

The Gentle, Jealous God

Reading Euripides' *Bacchae* in English

SIMON PERRIS



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The Gentle, Jealous God

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Simon Perris

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parentibus uxori liberis carissimis

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Note on Abbreviations, Texts and Translations

Abbreviations of classical authors and texts follow the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, fourth edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). ‘Aristotle’, ‘Aristophanes’ and ‘*Frogs*’ appear as is, in full.

- APGRD Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama: <http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/>
- Dodds E. R. Dodds (ed.) *Euripides: Bacchae*, second ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960)
- Kovacs D. Kovacs (ed. and trans.) *Euripides VI* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002)
- Roux J. Roux (ed. and trans.) *Euripide: Les Bacchantes*, 2 vols (Paris: Société d’Édition ‘Les Belles Lettres’, 1970–1972)
- Seaford R. Seaford (ed. and trans.) *Euripides: Bacchae* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1996)

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What brilliant plays he wrote! I consider Bacchae his best. Is it possible to represent divine power more beautifully or human ignorance more cleverly than here?

Goethe

Introduction

This is a book about a play: Euripides' *Bacchae*, a late fifth-century BC tragedy composed in Greek by one of the three great tragedians of ancient Athens. It is also a book about stories and their meanings. We are linguistic animals; telling stories is one of our most fundamental pastimes. The oldest surviving piece of European literature – the *Iliad* – begins with the poet saying, 'Goddess, sing me the rage of Achilles son of Peleus.' The *Odyssey* begins in the same way: 'Muse, tell me about the man of twists and turns.' Greek tragedies, too, almost always retold myths: traditional stories about gods and heroes. What we know about lost and surviving tragedies confirms that historical or completely invented plots were exceedingly rare; and that, as Aristotle asserts, most tragedies concerned known heroic families (*Poet.* chs 13–14). Euripides' *Bacchae*, which dramatizes the myth of Pentheus and Dionysus, is no exception.

But stories can be acted, too. Aristotle uses the word *muthos* ('myth, story') in the *Poetics* to refer to a dramatic plot. Both Plato and Aristotle distinguish between telling a story, enacting a story, and doing a bit of both (Pl. *Rep.* 392c6–398b8; Aristotle, *Poet.* ch. 3). The Romans, for their part, described acting with the word *agere*, the basic meaning of which is 'do'; from *agere* comes *actum* ('thing done') and so, ultimately, 'act'. The Greeks also described theatre as a kind of action: from *dran* ('do') comes *drama* ('thing done') and so, ultimately, 'drama'. All in all, Greek tragedy told stories (*muthoi*) in action. In what follows, I, too, tell a story about one Greek tragedy and what happens when we retell it in English.

Bacchae is a fantastic piece of theatre, one of Euripides' most popular works and arguably his masterpiece. It ranks among the most highly acclaimed ancient plays and holds a well-earned spot in the world theatre canon. And it has a rich history of performances, adaptations and translations.¹ That history is one subject of this book: after the present introduction and a discussion of the play itself (Chapter 1) comes a survey of adaptations (Chapter 2). But *The Gentle, Jealous God* is also, more specifically, about a select group of modern

English translations which take *Bacchae* in all manner of diverse, fascinating directions. Subsequent chapters address translations by Gilbert Murray (1902), H.D. [Hilda Doolittle] (1931), Derek Mahon (1991), Colin Teevan (2002), David Greig (2007), Robin Robertson (2014) and Anne Carson (2015).

As scholars have been insisting for decades now, translation is a unique, important, culturally significant mode of creative writing. Susan Bassnett puts it thus in *Translation* (2014):

So great is the role played by translation that it is no longer possible to view the translator as a lesser figure than any other writer, since the translator is the agent through which transcultural transmissions are effected. In this, the new Age of Translation, the time has come to acknowledge and to celebrate the centrality of translation and of the translator.²

It is also time, in this age of transcultural transmissions, to ask: what happens to Euripides' *Bacchae* in the language of global capitalism?

This play tells a good story in any language. The god Dionysus (son of Zeus, king of the gods, and Semele, princess of Thebes) has returned from the East to his birthplace, Thebes. Disguised as a priest of Dionysus (i.e. a priest of himself), he brings a chorus of foreign maenads (see Glossary). The young king Pentheus (Dionysus' cousin) refuses to honour or even to acknowledge the new god; in return, Dionysus has driven the women of Thebes mad and sent them off to worship him in secret hillside rituals. The action of the play begins as the old king Cadmus (Pentheus' grandfather) and the prophet Tiresias prepare to join the festivities on Mount Cithaeron; Pentheus, to whom Cadmus has entrusted kingship of Thebes, mocks them both. He then imprisons the foreign priest (i.e. Dionysus) before suffering a delusional episode. Meanwhile, the women of Thebes go wild in the hills (offstage), still maddened by the god. Dionysus persuades Pentheus to spy on them in disguise; Pentheus dresses in women's clothing and goes to Cithaeron. Led by Pentheus' mother Agaue, the Theban women kill him bare-handed and tear him limb from limb (offstage). Still delusional, Agaue brings her son's head back to the palace. Cadmus and his attendants bring the rest of the body, and he coaxes Agaue back to her senses. They mourn Pentheus. Dionysus appears in his proper divine persona to arrange matters in Thebes and to dispense justice. Cadmus and Agaue go their separate ways into exile. As much as

paraphrase can do it justice, that is the story: violence, horror, sadness and alienation. *The end.*

After Euripides' death, his son or nephew 'Euripides the Younger' produced *Bacchae* together with *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the lost play *Alcmaeon* and a lost satyr-play. In so doing, he won his namesake a posthumous fifth victory in the premier dramatic competition at Athens, the Great Dionysia.³ The very beginning: a blue sky, an empty stage and an audience; early spring, around 406 BC, during the day; the precinct of Dionysus Eleuthereus, on the slopes below the Acropolis in Athens. Thousands of spectators cram temporary wooden bleachers. A masked performer walks along an unroofed passageway towards the central open space. He takes his mark and speaks: 'I have come here to Thebes. I am Zeus's son Dionysus ...'

Performers, writers and readers knew and liked *Bacchae* for centuries thereafter.⁴ As early as the Hellenistic period, for example, we can see the bucolic poet Theocritus turning Pentheus' *sparagmos* ('tearing apart') into a moralizing vignette in *Idyll* 26. In contrast, a roughly contemporary epigram by Callimachus gives voice to a Dionysus-mask complaining of boredom (Callim. *Epigr.* 26 = *Anth. Pal.* 6.310). Having been dedicated to the Muses, it must now listen to schoolboys reciting a phrase from *Bacchae* over and over: 'This lock of hair is sacred' (*Bacch.* 494).

In Rome, the Republican tragedian Pacuvius partly based his play *Pentheus* on Euripides' *Bacchae*, while Accius closely reworked it into his own *Bacchae*. Vergil's *Aeneid* alludes to lines 918–19 of *Bacchae* in a description of Dido: 'Like mad Pentheus, Dido sees the ranks of Eumenides, / a double sun, and two Thebes appear' (4.469–70). He may even have modelled the entire second half of the *Aeneid* on Euripides' play.⁵ Ovid's version of the story in the *Metamorphoses* (3.701–31) positively revels in Pentheus' death. In particular, Ovid exploits the aesthetic pleasures of violence by staging *sparagmos* in a natural amphitheatre for our listening (and viewing?) pleasure.⁶ After the Romans' defeat at Carrhae in 53 BC, the Parthian king's court hosted a remarkable performance: a tragic actor sang extracts from *Bacchae* using Crassus' head as an impromptu stage prop (Plut. *Crass.* 33). And the emperor Nero – who else! – once took the stage with a lyre and performed a *Bacchae* or extracts from one (Cass. Dio 61.20).⁷

There was fun to be had, too, with literary allusions. The biographer Diogenes Laertius tells the story of a dinner party hosted by Dionysius, tyrant

of Syracuse. Dionysius invited his guests to put on purple clothing and dance. Plato, who was one of the guests, responded with a quote from *Bacchae*: 'I could never wear women's clothing.' Another guest, Aristippus, did put on the purple clothing before replying with more lines from *Bacchae*: 'in fact, even in Bacchic dances a woman who is chaste will not be corrupted' (Diog. Laert. 2.78).⁸ And in *Against an Ignorant Book-Collector*, the imperial Greek author Lucian attests to the popularity of *Bacchae* as a literary text while skewering an uneducated reader:

Demetrius the Cynic saw some uneducated person reading from a classic book – I think it was Euripides' *Bacchae*: the bit where the messenger narrates what happens to Pentheus and what Agaue does – and he grabbed it and tore it up and said, 'Better for Pentheus to be shredded once by me than over and over by you.'

Luc. *Ind.* 19

In the Greek-speaking East, finally, *Bacchae* continued to fare well in late antiquity and after. Long after full performances ceased, tragedy was still 'regarded as part of a cultural heritage in the broadest sense'.⁹ Nonnus (fifth century AD) spends three books of his Greek epic, the *Dionysiaca* (literally, 'stuff to do with Dionysus'), on events dramatized in *Bacchae*. Ioannes Malalas' sixth-century *Chronographia*, a mythico-historical chronicle, rationalizes Euripides' plot into secular political history, censors the *sparagmos* and exonerates Agaue (41.4–45.10). And then there is the (probably) twelfth-century AD *Christus Patiens* (Greek: *Khristos Paskhōn*) or 'Suffering Christ'. *Christus Patiens* is a cento: a text wholly or, as in this case, mostly, patched together from quotations. It borrows many lines from Euripides, especially *Bacchae*; it is an important witness for lost portions of the text. More to the point, it is a passion play about the crucifixion which significantly echoes *Bacchae*, in a number of ways, in theme and subject matter: persecution of a god, the death of a king, maternal lament and so on. *Christus Patiens* can be read not only as a silly curio but also as a sophisticated reception of Euripides. It views tragedy through a theological lens, maps Pentheus and Dionysus onto Christ and tests the limits of Christian drama.¹⁰

Greek plays vanished from the cultural radar more quickly in the West. And unlike other classics such as *Antigone*, *Medea* or *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Euripides' *Bacchae* waited much longer to reappear as even a faint blip. The early modern

theatre apparently ignored the play altogether. The closest thing to a nineteenth-century performance was *Pentheus: A Burlesque in Three Acts*, performed by the 'Shooting Stars' company in 1866 somewhere in Oxfordshire. The earliest documented modern performance was in London in 1908, and the earliest in the United States dates from 1921, with no commercial productions there until 1963.¹¹ According to Karelisa Hartigan, 'the play was known' in the United States, 'but the violence it described was too strong, its theme too disturbing to allow it a place on the commercial stage.'¹²

Since the 1960s, however, *Bacchae* has more than held its own. The University College London Classical Drama Society staged it in February 2015; Chris Vervain Mask Theatre staged it in masks at Theatro Technis, London, in March.¹³ A high-profile production ran from July to September at London's Almeida Theatre, with Ben Whishaw doing a star turn as Dionysus and Anne Carson providing the script (Chapter 8).¹⁴ Closer to home, the Victoria Ancient Theatre Society (VATS) staged my own translation in Wellington, New Zealand in October. Despite centuries of neglect, *Bacchae* now holds a position in the canon and the repertory to match the fascination it has long held for readers and audiences.

Given its comparatively recent elevation from obscurity to fame, *Bacchae* has much to tell us about reception in general. It speaks to us from late fifth-century Athens, a time and place of radical cultural, religious and political change.¹⁵ Likewise, it was in the short (and violent) twentieth century that Dionysus found fame and *Bacchae* found a home onstage. As Joshua Billings trenchantly observes, 'investigating the special status of the *Bacchae*' equates to 'investigating the conditions for Greek tragedy's meaning in modernity.'¹⁶ In fact, we are now in a *Bacchae*-reception revival, with five books in three years: Erika Fischer-Lichte's *Dionysus Resurrected: Performances of Euripides' The Bacchae in a Globalizing World* (2014); Courtney Friesen's *Reading Dionysus: Euripides' Bacchae and the Cultural Contestations of Greeks, Jews, Romans, and Christians* (2015); *Looking at Bacchae* (2016), edited by David Stuttard; *Moderne Transformationen der Bakchen des Euripides* (Modern Transformations of the *Bacchae* of Euripides, forthcoming), edited by Oliver Leege and Thomas Poiss; and now *The Gentle, Jealous God*.

Many centuries, and the work of many, many scholars, intervene between Euripides' Greek text and a modern translation.¹⁷ At some point in antiquity,

someone, whether the poet, a scribe, an actor or whoever, wrote down the text (*a text*) for the first time. Euripides the Younger then presumably acquired a copy, perhaps from Euripides' personal effects, before producing the play in the Dionysia competition; this hypothetical copy may have survived in a family archive.¹⁸ In the fourth century BC came Lycurgus' state-sponsored edition of Greek dramatic texts. Later still came an edition of 'selected' plays which we know included *Bacchae*. Then, eventually, came 'L' and 'P', the only two Byzantine manuscripts containing *Bacchae*; the first printed edition of a Greek text in 1503; and numerous editions since.

The Age of Sensibility saw *Bacchae* finally translated and printed in English; two collections of Euripides' complete works, by Robert Potter (1781–3) and Michael Wodhull (1782), split the honours. Further collections by Theodore Buckley (1850), Edward Coleridge (1891) and Arthur Way (1894–8) followed. One-off translations of *Bacchae* appeared, including one by a 'Mons. Glouton' published in Brighton in 1845. Unsurprisingly, *Bacchae* did not much appeal to nineteenth-century tastes. Regarding the play's reception in the Victorian era, Michael Walton observes, 'it is easy to see how ill Dionysus fitted into the Victorian vision of ancient Greece as a model of order and serenity'.¹⁹ But no matter: *Bacchae* was gaining ground at last. The 'popularity poll' of nineteenth-century English translations of Euripides 'is easily topped by *Alcestis*, followed by *Medea*, *Hippolytus* and *Hecuba*, with the *Bacchae* a little way behind them (but attracting increased interest towards the century's close).²⁰ And just as Gilbert Murray's 1902 translation gave *Bacchae* a born-again life on the English stage (Chapter 3), other translations encouraged further performances and adaptations. Still in use today, William Arrowsmith's 1959 translation provided almost half the lines for The Performance Group's infamous 1968 adaptation, *Dionysus in 69*; while Wole Soyinka explicitly acknowledged both Arrowsmith and Murray in a note prefacing his 1973 adaptation, *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (Chapter 2).²¹ And as later chapters will demonstrate, other productions with specific agendas also commissioned their own idiosyncratic translations.

Even so: why read translations? A practical and non-trivial reason comes to mind first. English-speaking monolingual readers, of whom there are many, many millions, must by definition read *Bacchae* in English. English-speaking monolingual audiences, too, must hear the play in English if they are to comprehend it aurally. As Edith Hall said recently:

One prominent Oxford-trained journalist, Harry Mount, in an article lamenting the decline of Greek in schools, recently described classical civilisation qualifications as ‘intellectual baby food’ with which students are spoon-fed, and as ‘classics lite’. This was to insult the entire community of state-sector classicists and anyone who ever reads an ancient author in translation. He and his associates have forgotten Gilbert Murray’s injunction that it is the Greeks, not Greek, who are the true object of the humanist curriculum.²²

Every generation needs its own Homer, its own Sophocles. (And its own pseudo-Aristotle?) More generally, translations of all kinds are fundamental to classics and classical reception.²³ Like Richard Jebb including facing English translations in his great commentaries on Sophocles, Latin students everywhere struggling to construe Cicero to their teacher’s satisfaction, John Keats sailing into Chapman’s Homer, or Ezra Pound making Propertius new, we remake, share and receive antiquity through translations of one sort or another. Neville Morley points out that translation and transliteration (i.e. the refusal to translate key Greek and Latin terms) are particularly significant practices in the study of ancient history.²⁴ And Richard Rutherford envisages translations contributing to the study of Greek tragedy:

With the boom in reception studies, translation studies too can expect to flourish, and a detailed survey of the history of translation of Greek tragedy in English would be illuminating for the student of tragic style in the original as well. Apart from their intrinsic interest, these renderings or ‘re-readings’ of tragedy can help us see more than we saw at first in a play or passage; even if we decide in the end that the translator has ‘seen’ what is in fact not there, the process has sharpened our own attention.²⁵

In Rutherford’s view, translations and translators lack independent authority; they do not so much see things for themselves as help others to see better. For a classicist, however, the right translation can be an intellectual pick-me-up, like browsing Dryden before teaching Vergil. I dub this the *weaker thesis* on classical translation: vernacular translations can help classicists.

My weaker thesis nods to Charles Martindale’s *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception* (1993), a foundational work in classical reception studies which advances two such theses, one ‘weak’ and one ‘strong’:

The weak thesis is that numerous unexplored insights into ancient literature are locked up in imitations, translations, and so forth ... The 'strong' thesis is that our current interpretations of ancient texts, whether or not we are aware of it, are, in complex ways, constructed by the chain of receptions through which their continued readability has been effected. As a result we cannot get back to any originary meaning wholly free of subsequent accretions.²⁶

Where Rutherford allows translations to help us see an original text better, Martindale's *weak thesis* allows translations and imitations a unique perspective of their own (i.e. 'unexplored insights'). The work of Donald Carne-Ross, for example, proves that translation studies and classical scholarship are utterly compatible.²⁷

The *strong thesis* holds that receptions of ancient texts always affect other receptions. Chains of reception influence, sustain and produce meaning; Vergil is never the same once one has read Dryden, Milton or Statius. *Bacchae* is never the same once one has read Gilbert Murray, H.D., Derek Mahon, Colin Teevan, David Greig or Anne Carson. Giving the play's reception its due, according to this thesis, means paying attention to translations (and adaptations and performances and so on), both as connected links in the chains of reception and as independent artefacts. And until such time as theatre practitioners primarily adapt ancient plays from recordings or other performances rather than from written scripts, ancient drama's main lifeline is translation. The strongest thesis of all, finally, is that translations can and do hold value and interest in their own right as texts to be read, studied and enjoyed.

Why English? English is now the global *lingua franca* in many spheres, including classical scholarship. (A full quarter-century has passed since Hugh Lloyd-Jones and Nigel Wilson wrote their preface to an Oxford Classical Texts edition of Sophocles, unexpectedly, in English instead of Latin.²⁸) *Bacchae* is especially prominent in English-language scholarship on Greek tragedy, and the play's reception as a whole favours English.²⁹ In turn, classical languages and classical translations have been fertilizing English literary history for a long time.³⁰ English is also the global *lingua franca* of translation. It is a major source language for translation into other languages and a major target-language for translation *from* other languages. And as a 'pivot language', English helps ancient texts reach new audiences worldwide. For many people, in fact, an English translation of a classical text is effectively the thing itself.

The Gentle, Jealous God tells a story about many things: poems, scripts, plays, translations, traditions and of course Euripides' *Bacchae*. It starts a conversation across disciplines, not only reception studies, but also theatre studies, translation studies, comparative literature and classics. And since such conversations need common ground, I will now address some of the key theoretical and methodological assumptions which underlie the rest of the book.³¹ (More straightforward translation studies terms and Greek words are covered in the glossary on pages 177–8.) In particular, it is necessary to consider what translation is, how it works and how we might conceptualize relationships between the texts discussed in the book and the Greek original from which they all ultimately derive.

Translation is a slippery concept.³² The standard English word 'translation', which descends from Latin *translatio* < *translatum* ('carried across') < *transferre* ('carry across, transfer'), uses a specific physical metaphor to describe all kinds of interlingual writing. "The word "translation", then, includes within itself a metaphor for translation, the metaphor of "carrying across".³³ But this metaphorical sense was not always dominant; 'translation' once described shifting something to another plane of existence. 'Bi feith Enok is translatid, that he schulde not se deeth; and he was not founden, for the Lord translatide him' (Heb. 11.5, Wycliffite Bible). Other languages have their metaphors, too, such as 'lead across', which passed from Latin *transducere* to French *traduire* and Italian *tradurre*. Further Latin metaphors for translation include *interpretari* ('interpret'), *vertere* ('turn') and *exprimere* ('express').

The common-sense definition nevertheless holds that 'translation' means saying the same thing in another language. Bassnett parses this view as follows:

What is generally understood as translation involves the rendering of a source language (SL) text into the target language (TL) so as to ensure that (1) the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar and (2) the structures of the SL will be preserved as closely as possible but not so closely that the TL structures will be seriously distorted.

The layman's view of translation is that whatever is written in one language ... can be transferred unproblematically into another language ... and it can be generally assumed that someone with good knowledge of two languages will be able to produce a competent translation.³⁴

Anyone who knows more than one language also knows that this 'layman's view' is ultimately a fallacy. Perfect translation is impossible; even imperfect translation is not always possible, let alone unproblematic. As Eugene Nida puts it: 'Since no two languages are identical ... it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages.'³⁵ Even so, there is translation, and there are translations. 'If the current theses on lexical, morphological, and syntactic structures are accepted,' writes Georges Mounin, 'one must conclude that translation is impossible. And yet translators exist, they produce, and their products are found to be useful.'³⁶

Matthew Reynolds's scepticism is salutary: 'I do not assume that the "many different kinds of thing" that may be called "translation" need have some theorizable essence in common just because they can be given the same name.'³⁷ With the common-sense view in mind, we might describe translation, in practical terms, as interlingual textual substitution:

[T]he pragmatic business of creating an English text that somehow stands in for a foreign one.

Matthew Reynolds

[A] process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another.

John Catford

[A] process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the foreign text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the translating language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation.

Lawrence Venuti³⁸

As I see it, the elements of translation are as follows: a translator to provide a 'chain of signifiers'; an audience; a foreign-language source text; a target text; and an intertextual operation or ratio which relates the target text to the source text, whether it 'replaces' (Venuti), is a substitute for (Catford), 'somehow stands in for' (Reynolds) or is 'approximately similar' (Bassnett) to it. And when it comes to Greek tragedy in English, that presumed relationship between a target text and its source text, more than a translator's linguistic expertise or any supposed correspondence between languages, is the practical basis of modern literary translation (see Chapter 4). Hence, a working definition:

translate: repeat or give an impression of repeating an utterance or utterances in another language;

translation: a text which repeats or gives an impression of repeating a text in another language.

The idea that translations and source texts are in some way equivalent has become deeply unfashionable. Many contemporary theorists see equivalence as a restrictive, normative concept, preferring theories based on description, function, deconstruction, localization, globalization, cultural translation and so on.³⁹ But equivalence has its place, and one need not insist on equivalence between languages for it to be a useful concept.⁴⁰ Eugene Nida's influential theory of 'dynamic' and 'formal' equivalence, for example, remains useful. Formal equivalence, which is 'basically source-oriented', is 'designed to reveal as much as possible of the form and content of the original message.'⁴¹ Formal equivalence means approximating not only semantic content, but also source-language vocabulary, grammar and syntax. Dynamic or 'functional' equivalence means imitating a source text's effects on readers. It is the 'quality of a translation in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors.'⁴²

In his book of the same name, Reynolds writes of 'likenesses'.⁴³ My own less euphonious term is 'textual verisimilitude': the cumulative quality of a target text which allows it to (seem to) repeat a foreign-language text. This quality, which is always contestable, consists not of strict entry criteria, but of family resemblances – likenesses – shared between source texts and target texts. As in real families, resemblances come in a variety of combinations. There are 'pseudo-translations' and even 'anti-translations'.⁴⁴ One famous example turns up in Jorge Luis Borges' 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*', a story which scratches away at the lines between transcription, translation and original composition. Menard wants to write his own *Don Quixote*. The two-and-a-bit surviving chapters of his *Quixote* are identical to the original. But, in an ironic twist, 'Menard's fragmentary *Quixote* is more subtle than Cervantes'.⁴⁵

Textual verisimilitude potentially includes anything which might facilitate the collective assumption of equivalence. This could be architectonic elements such as length, order, titles and headings, proper names and so on. It could be

aspects of style, genre, tone and voice. It could involve specific word choices. It could encompass characters, actions and other plot elements. It could mean including the source text alongside, nearby or hidden in the target text. Textual verisimilitude might even, paradoxically, entail obvious errors. In Ezra Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, most critics have seen apparent misreadings of Propertius' Latin as a flaw. But these so-called mistakes nevertheless give the impression that Pound worked from the Latin text and thus imply that his English 'homage' should in fact be read as a translation.⁴⁶ Nor do Celia and Louis Zukofsky's loose grasp of Latin and wavering commitment to writing intelligible English poetry keep the homophonic translations in their book *Catullus* (Chapter 4) from looking and sounding like Catullus' poems.

Equivalence can be seen as a pragmatic basis for translation practice: a 'socially operative belief that enables translations – and translators – to work' and which entails 'a *presumption* of complete interpretive resemblance'.⁴⁷ Quite aside from any real or imagined correspondence between languages, equivalence beliefs form a social contract that allows translations to be 'equivalent' to source texts. In Theo Hermans's view, equivalence in translation is established primarily by 'authentication', that is, explicitly describing a target text as a 'translation of' its source text:

Equivalence between a translation and its original is established through an external, institutional, perlocutionary speech act. Rather than being an inherent feature of relations between texts, equivalence is *declared*.⁴⁸

Literally authenticating a text as a 'translation' is one way of making translation happen. But there are other ways, and Bassnett is right to advocate 'think[ing] of translation not so much as a category in its own right, but rather as a set of textual practices with which the writer and reader collude'.⁴⁹

That collusion between translator and reader is crucial: equivalence is pragmatic, context-specific and socially constructed. Readers choose (or accept, or authenticate) translations that are fit for purpose. In that vein, Reynolds proposes a handy way to differentiate translation and paraphrase: paraphrases are obviously not the same as their source texts, whereas translations are often taken to be practically identical; one can quote a translation as though quoting the original.⁵⁰ (In this book, for example, I follow an increasingly standard practice and 'quote' Greek and Latin authors, for the most part, in English.) Hence,

the practice of using high-status target texts, such as the Authorized Version of the Bible, as actual source texts. Hermans calls this ‘pragmatic equivalence’:

This is the case of all those translations that are used and handled as texts in their own right, without reference to the fact that they are translations. They have to all intents and purposes replaced their originals. ... Pragmatic equivalence means that a translation has managed to make everyone forget its origin.⁵¹

Catford relates translation to ‘situational equivalence’: when a source and target text are ‘interchangeable in a given situation’.⁵² And in Gideon Toury’s formulation: ‘A “translation” will be taken to be any target-language utterance which is presented *or regarded* as such within the target culture, on whatever grounds’.⁵³

According to Hans Vermeer’s *Skopostheorie*, moreover, we can judge a translation (or part thereof) by its *skopos* (‘target’ in Greek; plural *skopoi*): ‘a technical term for the aim or purpose of a translation’.⁵⁴ After establishing the *skopos* or *skopoi* of a given target text, we can judge its success in achieving that aim or aims and thus gauge its ‘adequacy’. Admittedly, defining the aim(s) of a translation is problematic, some would say impossible.⁵⁵ But still: introductions, notes, programme materials, interviews, reviews and other ephemera which address the aims of a translation are part of its reception. Such ‘paratexts’ (to borrow Gérard Genette’s term) condition the reception of translations by altering horizons of expectations and rhetorically framing the perceived relationship between target texts and their foreign-language originals.⁵⁶

One recurring, aspirational *skopos* is particularly relevant to *Bacchae*: authenticity. We have seen already that ‘authentication’ can be a proxy for equivalence in translation. Authenticity – from the Greek *authentikos* (‘authentic, authoritative’) < *authentēs* (‘author’) – denotes those qualities which allow us to identify an artwork as being real, true and ‘authentic’. Denis Dutton identifies two primary modes of aesthetic authenticity, *nominal* and *expressive*; nominal authenticity is source-centric, whereas expressive authenticity is audience-centric. Above all, ‘authentic’ works of art are seen to be *true* reflections or expressions of someone or something:

First, works of art can possess what we may call *nominal authenticity*, defined simply as the correct identification of the origins, authorship, or provenance

of an object, ensuring, as the term implies, that an object of aesthetic experience is properly named. However, the concept of authenticity often connotes something else, having to do with an object's character as a true expression of an individual's or a society's values and beliefs. This second sense of authenticity can be called *expressive authenticity*.⁵⁷

In these terms, a translation is 'nominally authentic' if it is properly named *per se*: if its source-culture origins, authorship and provenance are correctly identified. A translation is 'expressively authentic' if it reads as a true expression of the values and beliefs of an individual or society.

For all their perceived modernity, classical texts like *Bacchae* speak in dead languages from a long-lost past. Given the vagaries of manuscript traditions and textual criticism, even the idea of an original text is suspect; modern editions of a classical work do not reproduce the text of any one manuscript, but rather present hypothetical reconstructions of the imagined, lost, authentic original. The question of authenticity is especially pertinent to the reception of Greek tragedy. Mary-Kay Gamel identifies four other modes of authenticity (effectively subsets of the 'expressive' mode) which pertain to tragedy in performance: processual, structural, inductive and critical.⁵⁸ She also identifies a paradox inherent in modern performances:

Here is the 'catch 22' of nominal authenticity: the closer a modern production approaches the formal conditions of its original production, the stranger it will be to a modern audience. The stranger the effect on a modern audience, the more different their reactions will be from those of the original audience.⁵⁹

Bacchae raises the stakes further. It is a world theatre masterpiece composed by that great proto-modern fifth-century playwright, Euripides. It is, or rather has become, a synecdochic representation of tragedy itself and a classic 'problem play'. It sets a thoroughly alien theology in a seemingly modern psychological framework.⁶⁰ Above all, as we will see, translators and directors of *Bacchae* must contend with Dionysus.

All of which brings us to the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and his very first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (full title: *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*). Published in 1872, *The Birth of Tragedy* was and still is an incredibly influential work in

which Nietzsche popularized, formalized, and ultimately institutionalized a philosophical–aesthetic opposition between the ‘Dionysiac’ (*dionysisch*) and the ‘Apolline’ (*apollinisch*) already introduced by the philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling. In short, *The Birth of Tragedy* assigns two antithetical creative impulses to the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus. Apollo stands for rationality, order and control; Dionysus for irrationality, disorder and freedom. Greek tragedy is held up as the ideal synthesis of the Apolline and the Dionysiac in art. Euripides, influenced by Socrates’ Apolline rationalism, suppressed tragedy’s Dionysiac side and hastened its decline. Nietzsche’s ‘Dionysus’, like his ‘Apollo’, is a flexible, open-ended metaphor which has bled copiously and often into the reception of *Bacchae*.

Metaphor is also vital to ‘the poetry of translation’: a provocative literary-critical concept outlined by Matthew Reynolds in his book of the same name.⁶¹ Essentially, Reynolds distinguishes ‘poem–translations’ from ‘poems of translation’. A ‘poem–translation’ is a poem which translates a poem. A ‘poem of translation’ does this and more. According to Reynolds, writers describe translation with a wide range of metaphors beyond ‘carrying across’: interpretation, paraphrase, opening, love, sight, loss, death, metamorphosis and so on. These metaphors can then be applied, in practice, as modes, styles or methods of translation. In a ‘poem of translation’, the translator draws one or more such translation metaphors from a source text and applies it to translating that text. (For example: translating ‘Mary Had a Little Lamb’ *sheepishly*.) The poetry of translation is a specific literary alchemy which occurs when a poem–translation reacts to a translation metaphor in its source text:

Not every poem–translation is a poem of translation: as we have seen, ‘translation’ is a loose term for different kinds of imaginative work, and the poetry of translation is only one of the sorts of writing that are done in its name. Nevertheless, it is an important one, for, as we will see, many of the translations that have established themselves as great poems in English literature have been energized and shaped by metaphors projected by their sources. When translation is doubled in this way, it can turn into a particularly complex and subtle kind of writing about all those relationships and processes – from friendship and desire to death and rebirth – which become metaphors for translation, and which are shaped by the metaphor of translation in their turn. This is the poetry of translation.⁶²

If translators conceptualize translation metaphorically, it is worth considering what kinds of translation metaphor *Bacchae* might contain. John Jay Chapman's 1915 essay 'Euripides and the Greek Genius' inadvertently identifies one such translation metaphor. Criticizing Gilbert Murray's translations of Euripides, Chapman writes:

For purposes of convenience I shall take up Murray's translation of the *Bacchantes*, because that play is in itself so very remote from British feeling that the divagations of the translator and commentator are brought into picturesque and startling contrast with the Greek. The sentimentalism of this British school when it fondles Greek intellect is like Agave with the head of Pentheus in her arms.⁶³

Murray and his translations led (astray) a British school of sentimental classicists. Like Agaue, Murray 'fondles' Greek thought in his arms, ignorant of what a precious and terrible thing it really is. In effect, Chapman has stumbled on the poetry of translation: 'ecstatic fondling' describes Murray's translation of *Bacchae* (Chapter 3) very well indeed. It is at least plausible that other poem-translations of *Bacchae* would also engage with such metaphors, especially those relating to Dionysus.

According to Charles Segal's *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides Bacchae*, in fact, the play is itself governed by a 'Dionysiac poetics'. Even more than the poet Euripides, it is Dionysus – disguised character, *deus ex machina* and god of dramatic festivals at Athens – who presides over the text; he authorizes, encourages and embraces ambiguity, ambivalence, illusion, contradiction, paradox et cetera, ad nauseam. Segal writes:

The *Bacchae* is a play about primordial beginnings, primitive forces, the clash of different cultures and different modes of constructing reality.

...

The *Bacchae* is itself about the process of constituting these symbolic relations, that is, about the relations between art and illusion, imagination and truth, and about the nature of artistic truth. For that reason viewing it through a variety of critical optics may help us better clarify its peculiar polysemicity and its relation to the changing shapes of the god who stands at its center.⁶⁴

Strictly speaking, *Bacchae* is about a god (Dionysus) punishing a man (Pentheus) and his family in a specific place (Thebes). In *The Poetics of Greek*

Tragedy, Malcolm Heath criticizes the ‘intellectualising application’ of Greek tragedy and illustrates the point with *Bacchae*: ‘Critics sometimes ask what a given play is “about”, and would not welcome the obvious answer that *Bacchae* (for example) is about the death of Pentheus and its circumstances.’⁶⁵ Not that we are to give up reading Greek tragedy:

[A]lthough I have no wish to outlaw intellectualising uses of tragedy, I would urge that we should *also* be willing to read and respond to the plays, and to subject them to critical scrutiny, without intellectualising preoccupations. To do so is, I believe, rewarding.⁶⁶

Segal and Heath advocate starkly different approaches to *Bacchae*: one postmodern, critical-theoretical and metaphorical; and one minimalist, intentionalist and historicist. Each approach is useful. More importantly, each has specific relevance for classical translation. Segal, practising reception, opens *Bacchae* to multiple new readings under the influence of ‘Dionysus’. Heath, practising sceptical historicism, is more interested in what we might call the invariant (see Glossary): the core of the play as composed by the historical person Euripides and performed in the late fifth century BC in Athens. With these approaches in mind, *The Gentle, Jealous God* holds both ‘Dionysus’ and Euripides in view. The play dramatizes a myth about religious conflict. Its well-made structure ticks over like an infernal machine and ends, inevitably, in bloody violence. And it features two diametrically opposed antagonists whose personal conflict can be situated by analogy in all manner of political, cultural and philosophical contexts.

The Gentle, Jealous God thus complements Erika Fischer-Lichte’s *Dionysus Resurrected: Performances of Euripides’ The Bacchae in a Globalizing World* (2014). According to Fischer-Lichte, *Bacchae* is the play of the twentieth century and of globalization. And if one is talking generally about dramas which feature Dionysus as a character, I agree. It is reasonable to assert that ‘we can expect to find Dionysus active and effective in many performances in various parts of the world, even if it is not *The Bacchae* that is being staged.’⁶⁷ But performances of something other than Euripides’ *Bacchae* can only tell us so much about Euripides’ *Bacchae*. In any case, literary reception of ancient drama mediates, and to some extent drives, performances. Theatre practitioners working with ancient plays typically use translations; they work, at least

initially, from written (and often published) *texts*. At the same time, translations of Greek drama tend to attach themselves to chains of literary reception.⁶⁸

Reynolds likewise looks for the poetry of translation in published poetic texts:

[T]he metaphors that I will be exploring flower best in the slow quiet of the printed page. They are fostered by the greater licence which we take for granted may be necessary in translating poetry; and they rely on being read with that greater attention to verbal texture which poetry characteristically elicits.⁶⁹

And for the most part, the translations I discuss are poetic, literary translations published and *prima facie* intended to be read as such.⁷⁰ Chapter 3 introduces a *Bacchae* ‘translated into English rhyming verse with explanatory notes’ by Gilbert Murray, an English classical scholar. Chapter 4 addresses H.D.’s ‘Choros Translations from *The Bacchae*’. H.D., who translated the *Bacchae* choruses via an intermediary French translation, had a self-taught working knowledge of Greek.⁷¹ Derek Mahon (Chapter 5) does not know Greek. He worked from intermediary English translations, and his *Bacchae* is subtitled ‘after Euripides’. Colin Teevan (Chapter 6) does know Greek. He worked from Euripides’ text, and his *Bacchae* advertises itself as a ‘new translation’. (He also calls his play entitled *Iph ...* a ‘translation-adaptation’ of *Iphigenia in Aulis*.⁷²) David Greig (Chapter 7) worked from a crib, with notes, by a classical scholar; his *Bacchae* has been called both a ‘version’ and a ‘translation’. Robin Robertson (Chapter 8) worked from a bilingual edition for his ‘new translation’. And Anne Carson (also Chapter 8), herself a classical scholar, presumably wrote her ‘version’ from a Greek text.

In this respect, Carson is an exception; modern ‘versions’ of famous plays are typically written via intermediary texts. By way of *versio* (‘turning’), the English word ‘version’ derives from *vertere* (‘to turn’), one of various Latin words once used to describe translation. Where ‘translation’ speaks of carrying across a source text into a target-language, ‘version’ speaks of turning that source text in a different direction. As Katja Krebs puts it: “‘version’ ... seems to be a term used by rewriters who have no access to the source text’s language yet claim to have been “faithful” to their source.”⁷³ (The phrase ‘after Euripides’ fulfils much the same function.) Modern ‘versions’ of famous plays typically

have the same *dramatis personae*, setting, structure, length and title as their source texts, without necessarily reproducing any one phrase, line, speech or scene. Describing something as a 'version' places the emphasis less on linguistic knowledge and more on the target text per se as a target-culture artefact which makes use of, but does not claim to be a substitute for, its original. And though a one-to-one, large-scale, genetic relationship is still assumed, there is no presumption of equivalence. Versions of *Bacchae* are expected to be like, but not the same as, Euripides' play.

The concept of 'versions' cuts across translation and adaptation. Where 'translation' connotes linguistic equivalence and 'adaptation' connotes invention, 'version' connotes neither, or both, or something in between: a free but not too free translation, perhaps, or a close but not too close adaptation. In any case, 'version' is a fluid concept.⁷⁴ Many scholars in fact dismiss terminological distinctions between translation, adaptation and so on as so much hot air or wasted ink. 'Much time and ink has been wasted attempting to differentiate between *translations*, *versions*, *adaptations* and the establishment of a hierarchy of "correctness" between these categories.'⁷⁵ Yet these distinctions persist and remain useful in criticism as in everyday usage. 'Adaptation may be understood as a set of translative interventions which result in a text that is not generally accepted as a translation but is nevertheless recognized as representing a source text ... [T]he history of adaptation is parasitic on historical concepts of translation.'⁷⁶

'Adaptation' derives from Latin *adaptatio* < *adaptāre* ('fit, adjust, modify'). Applied to intertextual writing, this image of fitting or adjusting suggests changing a source text to suit a different purpose; and making something new out of something old. In this sense, we can profitably think of literary adaptations as sustained, large-scale, isometric (i.e. one-to-one), inter- or intrageneric rewritings without textual verisimilitude; adaptations of *Bacchae* are avowedly new and distinct works created from the raw material of Euripides' text. The authors of two seminal works in adaptation studies, Julie Sanders and Linda Hutcheon, describe adaptation respectively as follows:

[Adaptations are] reinterpretations of established texts in new generic contexts or ... with relocations of ... a source text's cultural and/or temporal setting, which may or may not involve a generic shift ...

An adaptation signals a relationship with an informing source text or original ...

Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 2006

An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works

A creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging

An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work

...

[A]n extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art ...

Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2006⁷⁷

I would add one caveat: adaptation need not be announced to be perceived. Various literary, theatrical and televisual works adapt *Bacchae* without 'acknowledging' or 'signalling' that this is the case (Chapter 2).

So: with a premise in hand, opening remarks made and a theoretical background established, we are now ready to set off on a tour of twentieth- and twenty-first-century English translations of Euripides' *Bacchae*. For much of the journey, we will cross uncharted territory. As far as I know, this is the first-ever monograph about English translations of a single Greek play.⁷⁸ But we will not wander aimlessly. *Bacchae* is peculiarly susceptible to close reading in English. We have theses (strong, weak and weaker) to hand, not to mention the poetry of translation. As such, we will approach these texts as works of dramatic literature in their own right. We will map out a range of interpretations of *Bacchae*. And in doing so, we will adumbrate a new cultural history for this classic play.

Reading *Bacchae*, Reading Dionysus

In this chapter, I address a number of key issues pertaining to Dionysus, *Bacchae*, and in particular the presentation of Dionysus in *Bacchae*. We start at the beginning: out of nowhere, Dionysus appears alone onstage, announcing his arrival in Thebes where he was born. It is a fitting entrance for a god of wine, theatre, ritual madness and mystery-cult. It is also a fitting start to a great play. I translate literally:

I have come here to Thebes. I am Zeus's son
 Dionysus, born to Cadmus' daughter
 Semele; the midwife was fire, riding on lightning.
 I've swapped divine for human form
 and here I am by the rivers Dirce and Ismenus.

Bacch. 1–5

Even against its will, this city has to learn
 my rituals in full, since it is uninitiated.
 I have to defend my mother Semele
 and appear before these humans – the god she bore to Zeus.

39–42

And so I will show Pentheus that I am a born god –
 him and all the Thebans.

47–8

Dionysus is a god of epiphany. In myth, he frequently appears to the very people who have impugned his rights (or his rites). In the *Hymn to Dionysus*, he turns his captors into dolphins. The Thracian king Lycurgus threatens Dionysus' worshippers and ends up blinded by Zeus and hated by the gods (Hom. *Il.* 6.138–40) or, in another version, sealed in a cave (Soph. *Ant.* 955–8). Most famously of all, Euripides' *Bacchae* depicts Dionysus appearing in

anthropomorphic form, as he emphasizes repeatedly in his prologue, to punish Pentheus. (Another hefty metaphysical tragedy from the late fifth century, Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, depicts a human being leaving the natural world for the supernatural; *Bacchae* depicts a god who has temporarily left the divine realm for the human.¹) As Anton Bierl puts it, 'We can describe the plot of *Bacchae* overall as an epiphany of Dionysus.'²

What the actor playing Dionysus said through the aperture in his mask, as he entered the acting space on that early spring day, was, in Greek:

Ἦκω Διὸς παῖς τήνδε Θηβαίαν χθόνα
Διόνυσος³

Hēkō Dios pais tēnde Thēbaian khthona
Dionusos

Or, in English: 'I have come here to Thebes. I am Zeus's son Dionysus.'⁴ At first glance, this is an entirely conventional, natural way for a prologue-speaker to announce his arrival; a straightforward, generic Greek phrase which would not strike real-time listeners as being at all significant. Read schematically as the formal opening to a polysemous literary work, however, Dionysus' words introduce a raft of intellectual concerns which are of great relevance to the text: epiphany, ontology, identity, divinity and naming. Especially in literary translation, Dionysus' words may function programmatically:

Behold, God's Son is come unto this land of Thebes

Gilbert Murray, 1902

My name is Dionysus, son of Zeus
and Semele, Cadmus' eldest daughter. Whoosh!

Derek Mahon, 1991

An empty space, and all of you, and me.
And who am I? Dionysus son of Zeus

Colin Teevan, 2002

So, Thebes, I'm back

David Greig, 2007

Here I am.
Dionysos.

I am
son of Zeus

Anne Carson, 2015

I have come here to Thebes. Although this is not Dionysus' first visit to Thebes, it is a symbolic first arrival. He has come from overseas. He brings a new cult. His first word is ἤκω (*hēkō*, 'I have come'), an otherwise unexceptionable verb which was 'a favourite with supernatural visitants' in tragedy.⁵ In terms of tragic style, he is yet another divine prologue-speaker, and his entrance recalls that of Aphrodite in Euripides' *Hippolytus*.⁶ At the beginning of *Hippolytus*, Aphrodite says, 'I am powerful and famous among humans and gods; I am called the goddess Cypris' (1–2). 'The core of the [first] sentence is Aph's announcement of her identity: "I am called the goddess Kypris."' ⁷ Like Dionysus, she, too, speaks of divinity, honour and revenge (*Hipp.* 1–6). But Dionysus is exceptional. A quintessentially epiphanic deity, he stays on to complete his revenge plot in person; neither Aphrodite nor Hermes (in Euripides' *Ion*) do the same. Dionysus' physical presence, dramatic and cultic immanence and interest in human behaviour collectively shape his *Bacchae* entrance. As one commentator puts it, 'The imperious affirmation of [Dionysus'] divine personality rings out like a challenge and a threat.'⁸

I am Zeus's son. Hesiod's *Works and Days* opens with a hymn to Zeus rounded off by an appeal to justice (*Op.* 9–10). Aratus' *Phaenomena* begins: 'We should start with Zeus [*Dios*], whom we never fail to mention. All the roads and all the plazas, oceans and harbours, are full of Zeus [*Dios*]. We all need Zeus [*Dios*] always, because we are his children' (1–5). The apostle Paul famously alluded to this very passage when he spoke about the Unknown God to a crowd of Athenians (Acts 17.28). Greek tragedy, too, voiced similar ideas: 'What could ever happen to humans without Zeus [*Dios*]? Was any of this not caused by a god [*theokranton*]?'; 'None of these things is not Zeus.'⁹ The very second word of *Bacchae*, in fact, is *Dios* ('of Zeus'). Zeus is lord of Olympus and 'father of gods and men'. He has authority in the divine hierarchy, a major stake in justice (*dikē*), and some influence on (if not control over) fate. As 'Zeus's son', Dionysus is special.

Dionysus. The name 'Dionysus', which dates back to pre-classical times, probably has something to do with Zeus and may ultimately derive from a Proto-Indo-European (PIE) concept, 'son of the sky god'. Compare Dionysus' half-brothers Castor and Pollux: nicknamed the Dioscuri, they are sons of

Zeus who are also, literally, ‘sons of Zeus’ (*Dios-kouroi*).¹⁰ Dionysus is certainly old enough to appear on Bronze Age tablets in the Mycenaean Greek form DI-WO-NU-SO(IO). The first part of his name, ‘Dio’, is usually explained as a derivative of the name ‘Zeus’ related to the word-form *Dios* (‘of Zeus’). In turn, the words *Dios* and *Zeus* are related to the hypothetical PIE word for ‘heaven’, which is also the name of the sky god, **diēus*. As for the second part of Dionysus’ name, ‘nysus’, scholars once identified *nūsos* with a hypothetical Thracian word for ‘son’, but this explanation has fallen out of favour. A sceptical view holds that ‘Dionysus’ is not even a Greek name. Yet another explanation derives *nūsos* from PIE **sūnu-* (‘son’): **diuos sūnu-* (son of the sky god) > **diuos nūsu-* > Greek **diuos nūso-* = * *ΔιΦοσ-νυσος* (*Diwos-nūsos*) > *Διόνυσος* (*Dionusos*).¹¹

Whatever it originally meant, Dionysus uses his name to good effect here, in emphatic position at the start of the second verse, enjambed (i.e. running on from the previous line without a break in the sense) and balancing the parallel phrase ‘son of Zeus’ (*Dios pais*). The combination *Dios Dionusos* appears to have already been traditional in hymns to Dionysus.¹² Throughout *Bacchae*, Euripides activates that association and reinforces the presumed etymological connection by juxtaposing *Dios* and *Dionusos* in a verbal leitmotif:

*Hēkō **Dios** pais tēnde Thēbaian khthōna / **Dionusos*** (1–2)

I have come here to Thebes. I am Zeus’s son
Dionysus

Dionuson** ouk ephaskon ekphunai **Dios (27)

they said that Dionysus was not Zeus’s son

Dionusos** autos m’ eisebēs’, ho tou **Dios (466)

Dionysus himself, the son of Zeus, instructed me

*ō **Dios** pai **Dionuse*** (550)

O, Zeus’s son Dionysus

*ton **Dios** / **Dionuson*** (859–60)

the son of Zeus, Dionysus

taut’ oukhi thnētou patros ekgegōs legō

***Dionusos** alla **Zēnos**; ei de sōphroneîn*

*egnōth’, hot’ ouk êthelete, ton **Dios** gonon*

ēudaimoneit’ an summakhon kektēmenoi (1340–3)

I say this not as the son of a mortal father
 but as Dionysus, born of Zeus. If you had learned
 some sense, back when you didn't want to, you would
 now be prospering in an alliance with Zeus's son.¹³

Dionysus' name is susceptible to etymological interpretation. But is it translatable?¹⁴ When it comes to major gods and heroes like Odysseus ('Man of Pain') or Agamemnon ('Great Leader'), one typically translates epithets but transliterates names. One translator of Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, for example, renders *Amphitheos* as 'Godson' but transliterates Dicaeopolis.¹⁵ As for Dionysus, one does not usually call him 'Zeuson'.¹⁶ E. R. Dodds avers, 'Eur. seems to connect the two names etymologically, perhaps taking Διόνυσος to mean "son of Zeus", as do many moderns.'¹⁷ But this is over-cautious. *Bacchae* exploits the plausible (though not absolutely certain) etymological relationship between 'Zeus' and 'Dionysus' to invest the god's name with a cumulative, talismanic significance.

I have to defend my mother Semele and appear before these humans – the god she bore to Zeus. Homer and Hesiod agree on Dionysus' parents: Zeus and Semele, Cadmus' daughter (Hom. *Il.* 14.323–5; Hes. *Theog.* 940–2). The first *Hymn to Dionysus* (seventh century BC) places his birth at Nysa and mentions the extraordinary delivery: 'Some say that Semele got pregnant to Zeus who loves lightning and gave birth to you [*tekeein*] by the swirling river Alpheius ... But it was the father of gods and men who gave birth to you [*etikte*], far away from anyone, to keep you secret from white-armed Hera' (6–7).¹⁸ Herodotus' *Histories* (mid-fifth century) includes the earliest complete account: 'According to the Greeks, as soon as Dionysus was born, Zeus stitched him into his own thigh and took him past Egypt to Nysa, in Ethiopia' (2.146.2).

Euripides follows suit:

PENTHEUS. *He says that Dionysus is a god.*
He says that Dionysus was once stitched in Zeus's thigh:
But Dionysus was burnt up by lightning beams
along with his mother, who lied about sleeping with Zeus.

Bacchae 242–5

CHORUS. Daughter of Achelöus,
 young and beautiful Dirce!
 You and your streams once
 caught Zeus's child

when Zeus, the father, snatched it
out of immortal fire and into his own thigh

519–24

Dionysus is the only major Olympian born to a mortal. (The Dioscuri end up half-immortal, half-dead.) And in early Greek myth, he often has to prove his identity.¹⁹ The unborn Dionysus can only reach full term, as it were, by being sewn into Zeus's thigh. In another story from one of the so-called Orphic theogonies, Zeus enthrones Dionysus as king; the Titans dismember him; Athena preserves the heart, still beating; Zeus blasts the Titans; Dionysus has to be brought back to life.²⁰ And then there is the resistance of mortals like Lycurgus and Pentheus. By staging a totalizing epiphany, *Bacchae* asserts Dionysus' godhood in the face of that resistance. Yet he spends most of the play in disguise, pretending to be a human priest of his own cult. The play does more than dramatize the Pentheus–Dionysus confrontation as a violent epiphany; it asks the question, who *is* Dionysus? The answer, such as it is, requires three manifestations of the god: disguised but not dissembling (prologue speech: *Bacch.* 1–63), disguised and playing a role (most of the play) and fully himself (final appearance: 1130–end).

To this day, Dionysus continues to fascinate. Two recent essay collections, a conference and multiple monographs deal with Dionysus/Bacchus in the Greek, Roman and Christian milieux.²¹ And still the question remains: who is Dionysus? One could do worse than Albert Henrichs's minimal description:

Who is Dionysus? He is first and foremost the god of wine. He is also the god of the mask, who presided over dramatic performances in Athens and Attica and whose name and rituals were closely associated with the origins of tragedy and comedy. In addition, he was believed to inspire the female votaries known as maenads and to lead them to the mountain for their biennial rites of dancing and sacrifice. And finally, he recruited his followers not only among the living but also among the dead. It was in these four provinces – the wine, the theater, maenadism, and the underworld – that Dionysus exercised his power over the Greeks and their imagination.²²

By the late fifth century, that is, Dionysus had four main interests: wine, ritual madness, masks and theatre, and the afterlife. The speaker of a fragmentary poem by the seventh-century BC lyric poet Archilochus claims, 'I know how to lead off the beautiful dithyrambic song for Lord Dionysus, my brain

thunderstruck by wine' (F120). In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates puts Dionysus in charge of ritual madness (265b, *mania telestikē*); he provides 'release from our current problems' by way of 'purifications and rituals' (244e). Dionysus' theatrical side is equally clear. Athenian dramatic competitions were wedded to some of his most important festivals (Lenaea, Rural Dionysia, Great Dionysia). Aristophanes' *Frogs* depicts him going to the underworld himself to bring back a tragic poet who will save Athens. In a further underworld connection, Dionysus came to be identified with Iacchus, a figure associated with the Eleusinian Mysteries. And it is fairly well established that by the fifth century if not earlier, people throughout the Greek-speaking world were being initiated into Dionysiac mysteries: members-only cults, devoted to Dionysus, whose secret rituals secured a happy afterlife.²³

Dionysus' interests do overlap. But it is not immediately obvious what they have in common, nor did the Greeks themselves necessarily think of them as reflections of a single essential identity. Thus Henrichs continues:

The Greeks made no attempt to integrate Dionysus' different roles and to reduce them to a common denominator. Modern students of the god, however, have been reluctant to acquiesce in a Dionysus who amounts to nothing more than the sum of his multiple components.²⁴

In modern times, Dionysus usually appears not as in the *Hymn*, or drama, or epic, but as the all-encompassing figure introduced by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*.²⁵ A few years after *The Birth of Tragedy* and quite possibly under its influence, Walter Pater made Dionysus a god of life itself. Pater's essay 'A Study of Dionysus: The Spiritual Form of Fire and Dew' (1876) starts with wine: 'The religion of Dionysus is the religion of people who pass their lives among the vines.'²⁶ We are asked to imagine English poetry without the images of wine and cup. And then:

That supposed loss is but an imperfect measure of all that the name of Dionysus recalled to the Greek mind, under a single imaginable form, an outward body of flesh presented to the senses, and comprehending, as its animating soul, a whole world of thoughts, surmises, greater and less experiences.²⁷

From tree to vine to fire to dew, sap, and all the life-blood and fecundity which wine represents, Dionysus 'comes at last to have a scope equal to that of

Demeter, a realm as wide and mysterious as hers; the whole productive power of the earth is in him, and the explanation of its annual change'.²⁸

Even Dodds, in his influential *Bacchae* commentary, joins in:

His domain is, in Plutarch's words, the whole of the ὑγρὰ φύσις [*hugra phusis*, 'liquid nature'] – not only the liquid fire in the grape, but the sap thrusting in a young tree, the blood pounding in the veins of a young animal, all the mysterious and uncontrollable tides that ebb and flow in the life of nature.²⁹

Later, Dionysus came to represent, among many other things, human life (Carl Kerényi); blood-sacrifice, violent anarchy and self-destruction (Marcel Detienne); and the freedom to enjoy beach orgies (Arthur Evans).³⁰

In a minimalist account, however, Dionysus in *Bacchae* is a deity (*theos*) in charge of wine and ritual madness who wants to be worshipped by one and all. He is clearly the primary god of wine and grapes. 'Semele's son discovered the juicy liquor of the vine and introduced it to humans, and it takes away pain from long-suffering folk'; 'there is no other antidote for trouble' (*Bacch.* 278–81, 283). He maddens people. 'I myself stung [the Theban women] mad. They're out of their minds up in the hills' (32–3). His worshippers wear special clothing. 'I made them wear costumes for my rituals' (34). The chorus of *Bacchae* frequently sings in rhythms associated with Dionysus, and this distinguishing musical feature connects their *khoreia* (choral song and dance) inside the play to the wider world of *khoreia* beyond it. But Dionysus does not preside over theatrical performances in *Bacchae*. Any involvement in the afterlife is at best implied. And in any case, there is little certainty about the relationship between the practices and beliefs referred to in *Bacchae* and those of fifth-century cult.³¹ It may even be misguided to think of gods in tragedy as being the same, conceptually speaking, as their real-life counterparts.³²

Vase-paintings also support a cautious approach.³³ According to Thomas Carpenter, later (red-figure) vases distinguish three types: the Dionysus of myth (including tragedy), the Dionysus of comedy and the Dionysus of cult. Earlier (black-figure) vases depict him as the god of wine. But beyond that, there is no essential, all-encompassing Dionysus on the vases. 'The vase-painters' Dionysus is an Attic invention whose original purpose was to be a light-hearted symbol of the pleasure of wine'.³⁴ Cornelia Isler-Kerényi, on the other hand, collates Dionysus' appearances and activities on vases into a more wide-ranging

but nevertheless specific role: 'His main characteristic [on vases] is to be a god of the polis [city, state] in the wider and deeper sense of the term.'³⁵ This may be true, but it is not immediately evident how Pentheus' demise in *Bacchae* benefits the people of Thebes. (R. P. Winnington-Ingram, the author of a classic study of the play, concludes that 'Euripides recognised, but hated Dionysus'.³⁶) In any case, *Bacchae* was neither an indictment of nor an apology for a god or gods. It was a theatrical performance acted, danced and sung in real time and space by real people for others' entertainment; that is, a play.

Many nevertheless read *Bacchae* as a riddle to be solved. Already in 1915 Chapman could observe, 'The *Bacchantes* ... is the most tousled bit of all Greek literature.' Almost thirty years later, Dodds could still observe, 'No other play of Euripides has been so much discussed as the *Bacchae*.' At the turn of this century, it was 'the most difficult tragedian's most difficult play'. Even now, 'The *Bacchae* continues to escape any critical consensus.'³⁷ Various solutions have been advanced. Dionysus is a con man; *Bacchae* is a trick. It is a psychoanalytical depiction of rational and irrational impulses. It criticizes traditional religion. It documents a return to traditional religion. And so on.³⁸

Above all, *Bacchae* is a benchmark for scholars of Greek tragedy and performance.³⁹ According to George Sampatakakis, the play is uniquely important because it encodes specific modes of performativity, and requires specific performance techniques, which Western theatre only developed in the twentieth century.⁴⁰ *Bacchae* stages a play-within-a-play directed by, and also starring, the disguised god of drama. Accordingly, many scholars read it as a touchstone for tragedy's use of metatheatre: textual or extratextual references to theatrical phenomena or to a play's own status as a theatrical performance.⁴¹ In a book on Dionysus in tragedy, Bierl trumps 'metatheatre' with 'metatragedy': Euripides endows Dionysus with 'metatragische Relevanz' (metatragic relevance); *Bacchae* is a 'Tragödie über Tragödie' (tragedy about tragedy).⁴² What is more, *Bacchae* dramatizes a Dionysiac myth in which an outsider and insider fight over political power; Dionysus matters as much for being a god of theatre and the polis as for being a god of ecstasy and violence.⁴³ In Bierl's analysis, *Bacchae* is a tragedy performed in the Dionysia which is also, like Aristophanes' *Frogs*, an evaluation of what tragedy can do for Athens.

In *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*, Segal enlists Dionysus and the Dionysiac as interpretative metaphors. A 'Dionysiac poetics' defers final meanings:

The clashes between inner and outer space, mountain and city, in the *Bacchae* and the emptiness of the public and personal monuments that attempt to incorporate into the city the meaning of the god's destructive passage are the poet's acknowledgement that what he can achieve in the ordered microcosm of his play, his world of words, may not be possible in the macrocosm outside the theater and outside the text. Euripides' 'Dionysiac poetics' creates in fact an endless tension between world and text, a tension we can describe or even partially recreate figuratively but never exhaust.⁴⁴

And further:

The poet's probing of Dionysus in the *Bacchae* thus also probes the nature of theatrical illusion and symbolic transformation, the benefits and the dangers of substituting fiction for reality and engaging in mimicry, acting out passion and violence, playing at and playing with the serious business of life. The Dionysiac perspective questions just this division of serious and playful. What I have called the *Bacchae*'s Dionysiac poetics lies in the creation and exploration of the ludic space in which these interchanges can occur.⁴⁵

In this way, the Dionysus of *Bacchae* has become a post-structuralist metaphor, a hermeneutic key to life, the universe and everything. As Bierl puts it, the modern Dionysus 'eludes any attempt at a precise definition. Ultimately [in such readings] he can stand for almost everything and is thus a divine unknown which can be filled in with the starkest contradictions imaginable.'⁴⁶

A Dionysian metaphor with special relevance for *Bacchae* is *sparagmos* ('tearing apart'). One scholar derives an entire theory of tragedy from *sparagmos*; another uses it to analyse classical reception in Wole Soyinka's adaptation of *Bacchae*.⁴⁷ Most notably, Fischer-Lichte uses *sparagmos* to understand Greek tragedy in performance. The text of the play must be dismembered (like Pentheus) so as to be put back together and made meaningful:

[T]he text is a very particular material, which, in contrast to the actors' bodies and the space, has to undergo a complete transformation in order to be performed. It has to be dismembered: the artists, actors, musicians, stage director, and designer have to tear it apart in order to be able to incorporate it into a performance piece by piece ... The text has to be sacrificed in order to let the performance come into being. Without *sparagmos* and *omophagia* ['tearing apart' and 'eating raw'] there would be no performance. In this respect, staging a play always means performing a sacrificial ritual.⁴⁸

Dismembering *Bacchae* and chewing it over will help us, too, better understand it as a performance script and a source text for translation. In particular, we will observe more clearly the process of recomposing a myth as a fully realized dramatic plot. And we will be better placed to observe the various gestures that translators make towards performance in stage directions, textual divisions, and so on, which are crucial to the practice of translating theatrical texts. In the following ‘dismemberment’ (i.e. deconstruction) of *Bacchae*, I have in mind Oliver Taplin’s basic ‘grammar’ of Greek tragic stagecraft, in which entrances and exits mark act-divisions and beat an underlying pulse. I also adapt or reject Aristotle’s terminology (from the *Poetics*) at will.⁴⁹ But first, a brief digression on rhythm. Greek tragedies were performed in verse. Different metres in texts of Greek tragedies reflect different modes of verbal delivery in performance: speech; chant, often described by scholars as ‘recitative’; and song.⁵⁰ Alternation between speech, chant and song was fundamental to the overall effect of Greek tragedy in performance.

PROLOGUE (1–63)

Enter DIONYSUS. Prologue speech. Exit.

Enter CHORUS of Dionysus’ female followers from Asia Minor.

CHORAL ENTRY SONG (PARODOS) (64–169)

Hymn to Dionysus. ‘From the land of Asia.’

ACT 1 (170–369)

Enter TIRESIAS and CADMUS. They are preparing to worship Dionysus on Mount Cithaeron.

Enter PENTHEUS. He harasses the older men. Exit Tiresias and Cadmus.

ACT-DIVISION 1: CHORAL SONG (370–433)

Pentheus’ hubris. Longing to escape Thebes. ‘Purity, queen of gods.’

ACT 2 (434–518)

SERVANT brings STRANGER (i.e. Dionysus in disguise). Pentheus has him locked up. Exit Pentheus. Exit Servant and Stranger.

ACT-DIVISION 2: CHORAL SONG (519–75)

Appeal to Thebes, and to Dionysus, for help. ‘Daughter of Achelöus’

ACT 3 (576–861)

Sung exchange between Stranger (offstage) and Chorus; earthquake.

Enter STRANGER. He describes Pentheus’ delusion.

Enter PENTHEUS. Pentheus and Stranger interact onstage again.

Enter anonymous REPORTING FIGURE (conventionally called a ‘messenger’):

the Theban women have attacked a hillside village and remain at large. Exit.

Stranger persuades Pentheus to spy on the Theban women dressed as a woman himself. Exit Pentheus, then Stranger, indoors.

ACT-DIVISION 3: CHORAL SONG (862–911)

Celebration of Dionysiac ritual and traditional piety. ‘Will I ever dance.’

ACT 4 (912–76)

Enter STRANGER. Enter PENTHEUS, apparently delusional, in women’s clothing.

They fix his costume and prepare to spy on the Theban women. Exit Pentheus, then Stranger, offstage.

ACT-DIVISION 4: CHORAL SONG (977–1023)

Vengeance on Pentheus. ‘Hunting dogs of Madness.’

ACT 5 (1024–152)

Enter second anonymous REPORTING FIGURE: led by Agaue, the Theban women have killed Pentheus, tearing him limb from limb.

ACT-DIVISION 5: CHORAL SONG (1153–64)

Victory for the Theban women. ‘Let’s dance a chorus for the Bacchic one.’ Short astrophic choral song (i.e. without the formal structure more typical of choral songs in tragedy).

ACT 6 (1165–end)

Enter AGAUE, delusional, with Pentheus’ head. Sung exchange with chorus: Agaue brings the ‘prize’ from the ‘hunt’.

Enter CADMUS with servants carrying Pentheus’ body. Cadmus slowly draws Agaue out of her reverie.

Enter DIONYSUS, as himself, probably on the stage building roof. He organizes his cult in Thebes and sends Cadmus and Agaue to their respective exiles.
Exeunt omnes.

One could write a long book on the merits of *Bacchae*. This is not that book. But in preparation for later chapters, I will say something here about what the play does and how it works.

The tribulations of Dionysus may be the oldest dramatic subject.⁵¹ Aeschylus in particular wrote a number of lost plays on Dionysian themes, including the ‘Lycurgeia’ tetralogy, the main character of which was Lycurgus, the Thracian king who dishonoured Dionysus. A Theban tetralogy has also been hypothesized, the contents of which would have been something along these lines:

Archeresses, concerning the death of Pentheus’ cousin Actaeon;
Semele, concerning the death of Semele;
Pentheus (also called *Wool-Carders*), concerning the death of Pentheus;
Nurses of Dionysus, a satyr-play.⁵²

Ancient dramatists especially liked the Pentheus story, which was presumably well known to many in the audience at the first performance of *Bacchae*. One ancient headnote (‘Hypothesis’) to *Bacchae* states, ‘The plot (*muthopoiia*) is found in Aeschylus’ *Pentheus*.’ Whatever the configuration, however, Aeschylus’ Theban tetralogy differed from *Bacchae* in a number of important ways. In particular, Aeschylus’ Theban tragedies displayed the gods’ destructive power. There was less emphasis on Dionysus manipulating Pentheus onstage; other supernatural interventions were prominent. Hera appeared in disguise; Lyssa (Madness) appeared onstage; in *Pentheus*, Pentheus may have appeared only as a corpse.⁵³ Aeschylus probably also dramatized what was at the time the most widely known version of the myth, in which Pentheus himself leads soldiers against the Theban women, only to die in battle.

Bacchae shares tropes, techniques and source material with previous plays.⁵⁴ And like any Greek tragedian, Euripides reshapes and recombines this material. *Bacchae* concentrates on the royal family, especially Pentheus and Dionysus, more than previous treatments. Euripides also introduces two, perhaps three, major innovations which have become canonical. One: Pentheus spies on the

Theban women alone, unarmed, in women's clothing. Two: Pentheus is killed by his mother, who then brings back the head as a trophy. Three: Dionysus returns to the stage; the play ends with Cadmus and Agaue recognizing their error and going into exile.⁵⁵ In contrast with Aeschylus' treatment, Euripides' *Bacchae* foregrounds metatheatre, identity transformation, and violence within the community. The result is a moving new dramatization of a familiar story.⁵⁶

This dramatization is also exceedingly well constructed. According to H.D., F. Kitto, 'The *Bacchae* is the best constructed of all his tragedies.' According to Richard Seaford, its structure is 'for Euripides unusually coherent'.⁵⁷ Like most Greek tragedies, *Bacchae* observes the so-called Aristotelian unities of time, space and action.⁵⁸ Dionysus punishes Pentheus in a single day at a single location. But this play observes a further unity: unity of theme. According to Malcolm Heath's model, this would be 'centripetal unity', where everything relates back to a 'central' premise; 'centrifugal unity', where everything radiates out from a central premise, is more typical of Greek literature.⁵⁹ *Bacchae* manifests both kinds: epiphany is the narrative premise from which the play proceeds and the central theme to which it repeatedly returns. Almost every action or event in *Bacchae* relates causally to the main action (i.e. Dionysus coming to Thebes to punish Pentheus) and, at the same time, illustrates the main idea (i.e. that Dionysus is powerful). Ancillary or apparently digressive passages and scenes flesh out Dionysus' nature and lay groundwork – not causal but dramaturgical – for later developments. Faced with *Bacchae*, the great Romantic critic August Wilhelm von Schlegel was moved to observe: 'I must marvel at the harmony and unity in its construction, so unusual for this poet, the abstention from all that is foreign, so that all effects and motivations emanate from one source, and aim at one goal.'⁶⁰ Throughout, the play maintains an insistent dramatic rhythm, with the overall movement from revenge to pity (seen most clearly in exchanges between Dionysus and Pentheus) counterpointed by the aforementioned ancillary episodes; before Pentheus' death and Dionysus' reappearance conclude proceedings with a bang and a whimper.

Connections, parallels, juxtapositions and significant contrasts abound. Pentheus mocks Tiresias' and Cadmus' costumes, only to put on women's clothing himself. There are two narratives of *sparagmos*, and the latter not only echoes but also contrasts meaningfully with the earlier one. Dionysus himself

first appears at ground level, disguised, predicting revenge; he appears for the last time atop the stage building, in his divine persona, dictating terms. Pentheus' attitude to Dionysus shifts from antagonism to bafflement to curiosity to deluded fascination. When Pentheus first arrives onstage, he already comes to Thebes from a position of estrangement; his first word is 'out of town' (*ekdēmos*, *Bacch.* 215). When he returns to the stage for the last time he is no longer a person, not even a dead person played by an actor, but merely a head (i.e. a dramatic mask) and body parts. Mount Cithaeron plays an important role, too, not only as a mountain sacred to Dionysus but also as a brilliantly imagined heterotopia: a liminal space where people become something other than themselves.

The chorus of *Bacchae* is likewise unique and exemplary.⁶¹ It has been argued that *khoreia* (choral song and dance) is fundamental to the play's metatheatrical agenda.⁶² The play contains (some of) Euripides' best choral poetry. The odes are remarkably consistent in theme. And unlike say, *Iphigenia in Aulis* from the same trilogy, *Bacchae* can reasonably be said to follow Aristotle's recommendation that a tragic chorus 'contend along with the actors' (*Poetics* 1456a25); within the world of the play, the chorus-members' singing and dancing is naturalistic and in character. To modern eyes and ears, this chorus is as organically, carefully and successfully integrated as any in Greek tragedy.

Archaizing features (such as the old-fashioned trochaic tetrameter rhythm) make *Bacchae* seem older than it is. Gilbert Murray calls it 'the most formal Greek play known to us'.⁶³ This archaic flavour distinguishes it from self-consciously 'late' tragedies like *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Euripides' *Orestes* or Sophocles' *Philoctetes*; and aligns it rather more with that other strange posthumous masterpiece, Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*.⁶⁴ But *Bacchae* was also (ahead) of its time; it addresses pressing religious, social and political questions of the late fifth century. And it speaks to us moderns from a time of radical change, when people in Athens were perhaps already rethinking Dionysus.⁶⁵ The result is not so much perfect harmony as perfectly orchestrated dissonance. As Dodds puts it: '[T]he play's tremendous power arises in part from the tension between the classical formality of its style and structure and the strange religious experiences which it depicts'.⁶⁶ In Euripides' *Orestes*, a decadent, 'late' aesthetic authorizes all kinds of excess which time and again

threaten to reconfigure the generic norms of Greek tragedy.⁶⁷ In *Bacchae*, traditional form concentrates Dionysiac excess: one finds none, or at least very few, of the stereotypical flaws found in Euripides' plays by Aristophanes and countless readers since.

According to a minimalist understanding of tragic poetics, Greek tragedies (aimed to) elicit sequences of emotional effects.⁶⁸ As such, it is important to consider how *Bacchae* might affect the emotions, and in particular how pity might function in that process.⁶⁹ *Bacchae* is a play full of violence, verbal, physical, real and imagined; there are two narrations of *sparagmos*. And yet, as Gyburg Radke argues, there is also a kind of humanism at work.⁷⁰ Pentheus ends up a sympathetic victim; the depiction of his death and its aftermath is full of pathos. The earlier scenes of *Bacchae* invite us to see violence as vindication and to react accordingly; later scenes invite another response. In particular, the narrative of Pentheus' death, and the joyous reaction of the chorus to that report, encourage or at least allow audiences to reassess their attitude to violence. There may be a tension between Apolline formality and Dionysiac ecstasy in *Bacchae*, but there is also one between voyeurism and repulsion. 'It's understandable that you women would celebrate after all the evil that's been done, but it's not right' (*Bacch.* 1039–40). 'Cadmus, I feel your pain: your grandson's punishment was right for him but painful for you' (1327–8).

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle treats onstage suffering (*pathos*), one of three components of tragic plot-structure, as an addendum to reversals and recognitions (1452b11–13). But he also calls Euripides, for all his faults, the 'most tragical' (*tragikōtatos*) playwright because he writes sad endings well (1453a29–30). This is nowhere more true than in *Bacchae*, a play which assaults audiences' emotions in a thoroughly 'tragical' manner. One thinks of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* or *Antigone*, for example, piling disaster on disaster in the last act. According to one third-century AD writer, Euripides exploits two hackneyed tropes, the horrible death and the onstage corpse, to 'rouse pity for Pentheus' (Apsines, *Rhet.* 401.30–2).

Translators of *Bacchae* must also be amateur dramaturgs. Greek dramas include plenty of stage action, but the manuscripts themselves contain no original stage directions. Every stage direction is editorial, which means that translating Greek drama already entails a certain level of pragmatic explication (see Glossary). During the so-called 'palace miracle' (*Bacch.* 576–603), the

chorus-members clearly believe that an earthquake occurs. A modern performance either (a) portrays an earthquake realistically, (b) portrays an earthquake in some other way, or (c) does not portray an earthquake. Translators, too, must choose whether, and how, to indicate any of this in stage directions. Furthermore, the text of *Bacchae* is incomplete: the manuscript tradition is marred by two significant lacunae (gaps). One, at line 1329, covers over fifty lost lines and includes the moment when Dionysus re-enters the stage as a god. Whether by ignoring the lacuna, signalling it in some way, or filling it with invented material, any translation of *Bacchae* must address the staging of the crucial final scene.

A different textual problem relates to the very end of the play. *Bacchae* concludes on the same choral lines which, with minor variations, close four other Euripidean plays: 'Divine things take many forms; the gods make many things happen unexpectedly; what we imagine does not happen, and a god finds a way to the unexpected; that's how these events turned out' (*Bacch.* 1388–92). These lines may not be original.⁷¹ One could omit them, as Dodds observes: 'A modern producer would bring down the curtain on 1387.'⁷² Throughout the play's afterlife, however, this has become a well-known, emphatic and widely applicable passage which, like Dionysus' prologue, is often read programmatically: ideal fodder for creative translation. Derek Mahon (Chapter 5) repurposes these lines to recapitulate the themes of his *Bacchae*. Colin Teevan (Chapter 6) adds an invented metatheatrical coda. David Greig (Chapter 7) retrospectively casts his *Bacchae* as a 'hymn to the Scream'.

Bacchae also requires an awareness of tone and register. In particular, the play includes textual and dramaturgical elements which many modern readers (like, perhaps, some ancient audience-members) find humorous or even comic.⁷³ In one of the best-known examples, the sight of the two old men wearing Dionysian outfits and getting ready to dance is for many, as Pentheus sardonically describes it, a 'great joke' (*polun gelōn*, *Bacch.* 250). Later, in the cross-dressing scene, Pentheus becomes the butt of the joke himself, as Dionysus expresses a desire for 'All the Thebans to laugh at [Pentheus] walking through town looking like a woman' (854–5). And on Mount Cithaeron, the disembodied divine voice says to the Theban maenads, 'I bring the man who mocks you, me, and my rituals' (1079–81). The play as a whole thus encourages

or at least allows us to find humour first in Dionysiac cult and then, as the tables are turned, in the character of Pentheus. But few if any readers would argue that Pentheus' death is itself funny; even the *Bacchae* pity Cadmus.

Given the shadowy presence of Dionysus, the even more shadowy presence of 'the Dionysiac', and various aspects of text, context, language, performance, tone and so on, this 'most difficult tragedian's most difficult play' can seem obscure and overly esoteric. And it *is* esoteric.⁷⁴ But *Bacchae* is also an emotionally affecting drama about a young man being murdered by his mother and aunts. In that respect, it illustrates the cognitive–emotional reach of Greek tragedy by appealing to both heart and mind without ever offering easy answers.⁷⁵ If anything, the task of the translator is not solving the riddle of *Bacchae* but convincing us to pay attention in the first place.

Rated R: Adaptation, Violence, Revolution

[T]he beautiful, weeping creature, vexed by the wind, suffering, torn to pieces, and rejuvenescent again at last, like a tender shoot of living green out of the hardness and stony darkness of the earth, becomes an emblem or ideal of chastening and purification, and of final victory through suffering. It is the finer, mystical sentiment of the few, detached from the coarser and more material religion of the many, and accompanying it, through the course of its history, as its ethereal, less palpable, life-giving soul ...

Walter Pater¹

Translations of *Bacchae* are crucial to its reception. They reach a far wider audience than Greek texts or live performances. But adaptations also cast their shadow over any ancient play, and that shadow is extra long for *Bacchae*: its afterlife is richer, more complex and more challenging than that of any other ancient play.² And as interventions in that afterlife, translations are always potentially implicated in intertextual relationships with adaptations, especially those published in English.

Performances and translations of *Bacchae* have often engaged in transcreative practices associated with adaptation and vice versa. Erika Fischer-Lichte, in a book subtitled ‘Performances of Euripides’ *The Bacchae* in a Globalizing World’, devotes a chapter to Wole Soyinka’s play *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*. It is entirely reasonable to describe this play as an adaptation; Soyinka himself calls it a ‘version’.³ According to Fischer-Lichte, however, not only is Soyinka’s *Communion Rite* not a performance of *Bacchae*, it is in fact ‘not to be regarded as an adaptation of Euripides’ tragedy, but as a Nigerian play’.⁴ This is but one of many instances in which *Bacchae* destabilizes conventional categories like translation, version and adaptation. In this chapter,

then, I survey adaptations and other receptions of *Bacchae* in literature, music, film and theatre from antiquity to the present day, with a view both to establishing a diachronic context for English translations and to gaining a broader sense of the terrain.

Already in antiquity poets looked to *Bacchae* for inspiration; three in particular composed substantive retellings. The earliest, Theocritus' *Idyll* 26, celebrates Dionysus and his maenads, narrates the *sparagmos*, and justifies Pentheus' death. Theocritus' cameo also distils *Bacchae* down to its essentials; verbal echoes are sounded and the narrator assumes intimacy with the plot. Overall, *Idyll* 26 intervenes in the critical history of *Bacchae* in the manner of a public-service announcement, warning against impious misinterpretation: Dionysus, it seems, was one of the good guys all along.⁵ The poem concludes, 'No-one should criticize the gods' actions' (Theoc. *Id.* 26.38).

Ovid recycled *Bacchae* and other sources in his own hexameter version of 'Pentheus and Bacchus' (*Met.* 3.511–733), a self-contained story set within the Theban cycle spanning the third and fourth books of the *Metamorphoses*. Unlike Theocritus' poem, Ovid's fable refuses to keep the needle on its moral compass still. Pentheus is a horrible tyrant. At the same time, Bacchus is no saint, and Ovid ultimately suppresses theodicy in favour of madness, torture and bloodshed. According to one critic, the narrator's description of the maenads' hands as 'sinful' (*manibus ... nefandis*, 3.731) projects the reaction of 'sober, rational Romans' to the 'latent tendency towards ecstatic violence'.⁶

Also writing in hexameters, this time in the fifth century AD, Nonnus turns Euripides' tragedy into a self-contained mini-epic. The so-called 'Pentheid' comprises books 44 to 46 of Nonnus' monumental epic cum mythological biography, the *Dionysiaca*. And in contrast to both Theocritus 26 and Ovid's 'Pentheus and Bacchus', Nonnus' 'Pentheid' reads as a full-scale adaptation of *Bacchae*: a complete, tragedy-length rewriting. The Euripidean *muthos* is more or less covered, along with material from Ovid and the longer *Hymn to Dionysus*. Echoes of Euripides' Greek resound. But like Theocritus, Nonnus vilifies Pentheus; his Dionysus is a brave and merciful people's champion.⁷

Each poet describes the moment of death which Euripides' reporting figure (i.e. messenger) passes over, specifying that it was Agaue who decapitated Pentheus:

She [Agaue] took his left hand in her grip, set her foot on the poor boy's chest and ripped off his arm at the shoulder ... his limbs were torn off and his sides exposed. All bloody now, the women played ball with gobs of Pentheus' flesh.

Bacch. 1125–7, 1134–6

His mother ripped off her son's head and bellowed.

Theoc. Id. 26.20

She pulled off the head and held it in her bloody hands.

Ov. Met. 3.725–7

His confused mother set her foot against her son's chest and, as he lay there, sliced through his brash neck with a sharp *thursos*.

Nonnus, *Dion.* 46.214–16

Taking the same source material, each account works differently on readers' perceptions of the *sparagmos*, of Dionysus/Bacchus, and of Euripides' play. *Idyll* 26 recasts *Bacchae* as a warning to the impious. Ovid sets Pentheus' story in a tragic history of Thebes yet orients it towards Rome.⁸ The *Dionysiaca*, finally, depicts a Christ-like Dionysus who pities Pentheus. Already in these three hexameter adaptations from antiquity, then, one finds quite different interpretations. We know that Agaue has killed her son; for many adaptors, the real question is why. This question is not unanswered in the source material, of course, for *Bacchae* specifies a proximate and an ultimate cause: Dionysus drives Agaue mad to punish Pentheus; under the influence of Dionysus, Agaue attacks her son. Yet the impulse to relitigate that unasked question (*why?*) persists.

More recently, *Bacchae* has inspired numerous musical works. Although Alcestis, Hippolytus, Iphigenia and Medea are the most popular Greek tragic figures in Western art music, 'the terrors of *The Bacchae* have appealed to a number of modern composers.'⁹ Ralph Vaughan Williams, Béla Bartók, Iannis Xenakis and Philip Glass, to name a few, have composed ballets or incidental music related to *Bacchae*. There is also a small handful of choral works. Ernest Walker and Gustav Holst each composed a *Hymn to Dionysus* from Gilbert Murray's translation (1906 and 1913 respectively), while modern composers in England and North America continued to score texts from the play in subsequent decades.

Bacchae has made more music on the stage than in the concert hall. It is the basis for more than twenty operas, from *Penthée* (1703), by Philippe, Duke of Orléans; to Stefano Pavesi's *I Baccanali* (1807); to Lidia Testore's *Baccante* (1917); to more recent works. It does not transfer as easily into a libretto as some ancient plays, however, and librettists have more often freely adapted it. This is certainly true of W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman's libretto for Hans Werner Henze's opera *The Bassarids* (1966). Auden 'maintained, correctly, that Euripides' text is unviable as it stands for a modern opera'.¹⁰

The Bassarids belongs to a group of 'dialectical' opera adaptations which adopt Nietzsche's Apollo–Dionysus opposition but respond differently to it, rethinking *Bacchae* in all manner of ways.¹¹ Three such adaptations are among the best-known *Bacchae* operas: Karol Szymanowski's *Król Roger* (King Roger, 1926), Harry Partch's *Revelation in the Courthouse Park* (1961), and *The Bassarids* (1966). *Król Roger* allows Dionysian (i.e. exotic or ecstatic) musical elements into the score while also making room for Apollo in the drama. At the court of Roger II of Sicily, a shepherd arrives to introduce a new cult; after converting much of the court, the shepherd transforms into Dionysus. As the opera ends, the king greets the rising sun (i.e. Apollo) and the music comes to an anticlimactic resolution. According to Jim Samson:

[T]he opera [*Król Roger*] makes clear the need for Dionysus, and in musical terms its richness lies precisely in the fact that the exoticisms of earlier works, far from being eliminated, are rather placed within a new and broader perspective.¹²

In *The Bassarids*, the Apollo–Dionysus conflict breaks out into a pitched battle between score and libretto. Auden and Kallman humanize Pentheus, and Dionysus is the outright villain of their text. Henze, reading their libretto against the grain, saw a celebration of Dionysus. His score sets Apolline and Dionysiac sound-worlds against one another; Dionysus wins. 'Henze's great achievement in the opera is to recreate in music Euripides' main theme – the conflict between Pentheus and Dionysus, and the increasingly overt power of the god'.¹³

Partch's so-called music–dance drama *Revelation in the Courthouse Park*, finally, applies Nietzsche's dialectic as a structural principle. The setting alternates between small-town America (the courthouse park) for the 'choruses', featuring modern-day religious leader Dion (partly based on Elvis Presley) and

conservative Sonny; and ancient Thebes for scenes featuring Euripides' characters. Both storylines end in disaster, and Partch does not resolve the Apollo–Dionysus tension: 'The composer clearly identified both with Dion/Dionysus, master of the sacred revels, and Sonny/Pentheus, the nonconformist outsider; the irreconcilability of these roles constitutes the heart of the tragedy.'¹⁴

Musicals have featured Dionysian figures, from the deaf, dumb and blind pinball-playing messiah of The Who's 1969 rock opera *Tommy* and the subsequent musical *The Who's Tommy* (1992); to Frank N. Furter, the alien transvestite mad scientist of *The Rocky Horror Show* (1973). Adaptations and productions of *Bacchae* have in turn reclaimed this 'musical messiah' figure. Some directors have even mounted *Bacchae* itself as a full-blown musical, with mixed results. Peter Mills's *The Rockae* (2007) was billed as a hard-hitting heavy-metal musical; in the end, according to one reviewer, it delivered 'more Broadway rock than stadium metal', with too much 'eyeliner and wink-wink banter' undermining the emotional punch of Euripides' finale.¹⁵ Other examples include *Rave: The Bacchae of Euripides – Remixed* (2003); *The God That Comes* (2013), a one-man rock 'n' roll cabaret adaptation; and a 2015 *Bacchae* promising 'an immersive rave experience' by the Freeks theatre company at Stanford University.¹⁶ All in all, adaptors have found Dionysus and his maenads more than capable of making music.

Dionysus has also had his moments, if not the full fifteen minutes, of onscreen fame.¹⁷ Five films in particular present large-scale visions of *Bacchae*:

1. *Le baccanti* (1961), known in English as *Bondage Gladiator Sexy*, by Italian director Giorgio Ferroni. Ferroni's expansive epic sympathizes with Dionysus yet still allows Pentheus a heroic death by the sword.
2. *Dionysus* (1963), by Charles Boultenhouse. In this 26-minute avant-garde film essay, dancers perform the three principal roles of Pentheus, Dionysus and Agaue; there is a chorus of filmmakers.
3. *Dionysus in 69* (1970), by Brian de Palma, uses the director's trademark split screen to document a performance of *Dionysus in 69* by The Performance Group.
4. *Two Suns in the Sky* (1991), by Giorgos Stambouloupoloulos. In the fourth century AD, Christianity clashes with paganism and ancient Greek drama. *Two Suns in the Sky* (the title of which alludes to lines 918–19)

includes shots of actors performing *Bacchae* and concludes with a realistic *sparagmos*.

5. *The Bacchae* (2002, unreleased), by Brad Mays. This independent film grew out of Mays's own stage production; funding problems stymied its distribution.

Violence holds considerable aesthetic appeal. *Bacchae* is a violent play, and one obvious strategy would be to adapt it as a slasher film or supernatural thriller. But this text arguably suits an art-house cinematic idiom more than cheap thrills. Depicting violence onscreen in a realistic *mise en scène* runs counter to the play's deep structures, for, as is typical of Greek tragedy, it does not enact violent death onstage. Overall, *Bacchae* undermines or at least complicates straightforward screen adaptation: 'the canonical status of ... Euripides' *Bacchae* on the modern theatrical stage has yielded a surprisingly small number of [direct] film adaptations.'¹⁸ Nevertheless, the range of idiosyncratic responses across just five films underscores its flexibility.

In the realm of prose fiction, Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) brought in its wake a succession of Dionysian novels and stories.¹⁹ Although few engage noticeably with Euripides, a select group of writers has found *Bacchae* to be a congenial guide around humanity's darker corners. The earliest, and best, of these fiction works is *Lord of the Flies* (1954), by William Golding. *Lord of the Flies*, a timeless fable about shipwrecked schoolboys gone feral, condemns humanity's violent tendencies and rebuts R. M. Ballantyne's insipid perennial, *The Coral Island* (1858). *Lord of the Flies* is also a response to Dodds's 1944 *Bacchae* commentary.²⁰ Speaking about his debt to Euripides, Golding said: 'Of course I know the play [*Bacchae*], and at the time [of writing *Lord of the Flies*] knew Dodds's magnificent edition better than my own hand. *But one work does not come from another unless it is stillborn*.'²¹ Jack Merridew is a Dionysian figure; 'merry dew' = wine. Ralph, Piggy and Pentheus have various traits in common, including naïveté, orderliness, rationalism, scepticism and vulnerability. Shared thematic motifs and plot elements include hunting, animal sacrifice, a quasi-*thiasos* (see Glossary), orgiastic music, cross-dressing and violence. Jack arrives leading a boys' choir in robes.²² Simon suffers *sparagmos*:

The beast [Simon] struggled forward, broke the ring and fell over the steep edge of the rock to the sand by the water. At once the crowd surged after it,

poured down the rock, leapt on to the beast, screamed, struck, bit, tore. There were no words, and no movements but the tearing of teeth and claws.²³

Following Dodds's *Bacchae* commentary, *Lord of the Flies* depicts what happens when the irrational is no longer contained and the human condition is more than a euphemism.

Unlike Golding's indirect homage, Mary Renault's historical novel *The Mask of Apollo* (1966) refers directly to *Bacchae* and narrates not one but two fictional ancient performances of the play. Like most prose receptions of *Bacchae*, it is an example of what Julie Sanders calls 'appropriation'.²⁴ Set in the mid-fourth century BC, the novel tells the story of Nikeratos, a tragic actor entangled in the struggle for Syracuse between the tyrant Dionysius II and his uncle Dion; Plato is also involved. In the first paragraphs of the book, Nikeratos recounts how his own father died of a chill caught while performing *Bacchae*. A later passage describes, at length, Nikeratos producing and playing the lead role in a command performance at Syracuse.²⁵ The detailed account of Nikeratos' production suggests intimacy with the text and with Dodds's commentary.

The third entry in this de facto series is *The Secret History* (1992), by American Pulitzer Prize winner Donna Tartt. At a fictional Vermont college, an oddball professor teaches a close-knit group of classics students about Dionysus. The group forms a *thiasos*. They 'see' Dionysus. During one of their rituals, however, they accidentally kill a local man bare-handed. And when another friend finds out, they murder him to protect themselves. Perhaps surprisingly, Dodds is a significant presence in *The Secret History*. The epigraph for Part II comes from his monograph *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951).²⁶ More importantly, a key passage involves the classics professor, Julian, drawing on *The Greeks and the Irrational*, the *Bacchae* commentary and Plato's *Phaedrus* to describe Dionysian madness:

It is dangerous to ignore the existence of the irrational. The more cultivated a person is, the more intelligent, the more repressed, then the more he needs some method of channelling the primitive impulses he's worked so hard to subdue.

...

Euripides speaks of the Maenads: head thrown back, throat to the stars, 'more like deer than human being'.²⁷

In point of fact, neither Euripides nor any of his English translators wrote those words. But one catches the general drift. In Julian's voice, Tartt turns to Dodds here (and elsewhere) to explain human psychology. Dodds's Dionysus animates the murder plot; as in *Lord of the Flies*, Dodds's *Bacchae* commentary is the hypotext for a violent fable. *The Secret History* is by turns a college novel, a blockbuster 'whydunnit', a novel of ideas, a metafictional experiment and a loose adaptation of a classical commentary.

The Cuban-born novelist José Carlos Somoza intertwines these threads of violence, the irrational, Plato, and Euripides in *La caverna de las ideas* (The Cave of Ideas, 2000). In the present day, the narrator works on translating a supposedly authentic ancient Greek text, titled 'The Athenian Murders'. He is eventually captured, and his footnotes outline a metatextual murder mystery taking place in the novel's present. In 'The Athenian Murders', on the other hand, a fourth-century BC sleuth traces a series of deaths in Athens to a secret Dionysiac cult. He discovers that one cult member and purported victim volunteered to suffer *sparagmos* at the hands of his own mother, who admits, like Agaue, 'I was the first to sink my nails into his chest.'²⁸ *Bacchae* has become an embedded proof-text justifying violent rituals:

At Archelaus' court, Euripides witnessed the rites of Lykaion, and was transformed. He wrote a play, a tragedy, quite unlike his previous work – *Bacchantes*, in praise of fury, dance and orgiastic pleasure. He intended it to repay his debt to primitive theatre, which belongs to Dionysus ...²⁹

Somoza outdoes *The Secret History* and *Lord of the Flies* by embedding the classical hypotext (*Bacchae*) in his own metafictional hypotext ('The Athenian Murders').

The less said about *Dionysus in New York* (2008), by retired New York State Supreme Court Justice Nicholas Clemente, the better. Constantine 'Dion' Bacchus, a half-Greek, half-Native-American faith healer and human incarnation of Dionysus, embarks on a speaking tour. Dion plans to have his arch-enemy, New York mayor Horace Penney, killed by his own mother at a public rally. In the end, Dion himself dies at the rally when a magical, champagne-filled totem pole breaks. After death, he finds himself in Olympus, destined to woo Athena! Even speculative fiction plays along: in Hal Duncan's dark, sprawling SF novel *Ink* (2007), a time-travelling players' troupe performs *Bacchae*.

Dionysus occasionally stars in post-classical poetry from Ronsard's sixteenth-century Dionysiac poems to *Dionizje* (Dionysiacs, 1922), by the Polish writer Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz (1894–1980); Edward Arlington Robinson's 'Dionysus and Demos' (1925); and *Dionysus Crucified* (2011), by English poetry professor Simon Jarvis. Other poets, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, have responded specifically to *Bacchae*. Their responses fall into four general groups: tentative allusions, such as in George Seferis's laconic 'Pentheus' (1954); brief mentions, as in Algernon Charles Swinburne's 'Tiresias' (1871); longer epic narratives; and shorter lyric narratives.

The third group includes Richard Edwin Day's insufferable 'The Conquest of Thebes' (1909) and Robinson Jeffers's rather more enjoyable 'The Women on Cythaeron' (1928). As epic adaptations like Nonnus' 'Pentheid', these works wring poetry from Euripides' *muthos*. The shorter poems in the fourth category, by contrast, typically ponder what happens to the survivors afterwards. Thomas Blackburn's 'Bacchae' (1958) begins a mannered retelling before honing in on Agaue's lived experience. Donald Davie's 'Agave in the West' (1961) compares her exile to visiting the United States. And Donald Finkel's 'Chorus of the Drunken Women' (1959) glances pessimistically at the present:

In the city, no king, winter,
The wild vine clipped and raw. Death
Is for the living, we are the body,
We bleed where the limbs are fallen.³⁰

In contemporary literature, Dionysus and his family generally play second fiddle to Orpheus, Agamemnon, Medea and others. Yet *Bacchae* has still seen its share of inter-generic (i.e. non-theatrical) receptions, and certain trends and themes are visible. Violence is important; so is performance. So, too, are Nietzsche, Dodds and Plato. And linear, one-to-one adaptations tend to succeed less in fiction and poetry than those with a more idiosyncratic attitude to Euripides' *muthos*.

The final category is perhaps the most important: intrageneric (i.e. theatrical) receptions. Well before Gilbert Murray translated *Bacchae*, Oxford undergraduates Vincent Amcotts and William Reynell Anson adapted it into a domestic farce about adultery and intemperance: *Pentheus: A Burlesque in Three Acts* (1866). As is appropriate for a self-described burlesque, *Pentheus*

travesties *Bacchae* into kitchen-sink comedy. Pentheus, public temperance supporter but private drinker, catches his wife, Agaue, with her lover, Glaucon; together with her sister Ino, he threatens them with sobriety. Bacchus, a wine merchant, gets him drunk; he spontaneously combusts before being catasterized. But *Pentheus* did more than sweeten *Bacchae* for Victorian audiences. Pentheus threatens Bacchus with a night in the *cellar*, not a jail; Bacchus invites him to wear a *mask*, not a dress. Puns and anachronisms are particularly evident. Bacchus insists, 'Oh, I've a part essential to the play. I am the *deus*, ma'am, *ex machinâ*.'³¹

For all its undergraduate irreverence, *Pentheus* does not open *Bacchae* to multiple readings, or to a radical agenda, but rather folds it into a black-and-white worldview. Bacchus clarifies this worldview in a metatheatrical prophecy:

Then count me as a friend; your spirits rally:
 Events will turn out right eventually,
 For 'tis by strict dramatic rule recorded,
 Vice must be punished, virtue be rewarded.³²

Within a closed moral universe, *Pentheus* rereads *Bacchae* not as a mystery, but rather as a clear statement of a theme: vice punished and virtue rewarded 'by strict dramatic rule'. In effect, Amcotts and Anson treat universal justice as the 'natural pleasure' (Aristotle's term: *oikeia hēdonē*) of comic burlesque. The villain, in their analysis, is the moralizer Pentheus. Even in the Victorian era, it seems, *Bacchae* could be recognized, and to a degree celebrated, as a manifesto for being naughty.

Bacchae has never again to my knowledge been reworked into a morality play about the temperance movement, though G. B. Shaw's *Major Barbara* (see below) comes close. *Pentheus* does, however, display certain phenomena which consistently recur in the play's reception, not least humour, metatheatre, burlesque, anachronism, sex and alcohol. In fact, *Pentheus* is the first in a long line of modern theatrical adaptations. Even limiting the scope to new plays published in English (in print or online) for which *Bacchae* is a major hypotext, the following survey includes no fewer than eighteen possible examples dating from 1866 to 2011.³³

1. *Pentheus: A Burlesque in Three Acts* (1866)
2. *Major Barbara* (1905), by George Bernard Shaw: a double adaptation of *Bacchae* and *Frogs*. The Euripidean material comes in the first two acts,

followed by 'clear allusions to Aristophanes' *Frogs* in its third act'.³⁴ Barbara Undershaft is a Salvation Army major working with the poor. Barbara's estranged father, munitions dealer Andrew Undershaft, reappears and offers money to the Salvation Army. Barbara is horrified. On a visit to Undershaft's factory, her fiancé Adolphus Cusins (a scholar of ancient Greek modelled on Gilbert Murray) agrees to inherit the business. Barbara resolves to marry him and use Undershaft's money for good.

3. *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958), by Tennessee Williams. In this loose adaptation, Catharine Holly is forced to describe the death of her cousin Sebastian Venable: he was torn limb from limb by a gang of young men whose sexual favours he had sought.
4. *Gentle Jack* (1963), by English playwright and screenwriter Robert Bolt. Jacko Cadence, voted in as Jack-in-the-Green while on holiday, meets a fairy named Jack. Jack rewards Jacko and his associates with wealth, sex and fulfilment. Jack is killed by the chorus; when they reveal him, 'his face is a red mask'.³⁵
5. *The Erpingham Camp* (1966), by the English master of black comedy, Joe Orton. The play is set at an unnamed English holiday camp. A camper, Kenny (originally to be named 'Don'), is angered by an insult to his pregnant wife. The camp manager, Erpingham, tries to restrain him. Kenny and other campers engage in looting and violence; Erpingham attempts reconnaissance but is killed in a *mêlée*, falling through a hole in the floor; his body is mourned.
6. Auden and Kallman's libretto for Henze's opera *The Bassarids* (1966).
7. *A Refined Look at Existence* (1966), by Australian playwright and painter Rodney Milgate. The *dramatis personae* speak volumes: Belly Cadmush and his wife Harmony; Fred Tiresash; Simile Smith and her husband Jovey; Donny, Simile's son by a lover named Mort Paramour; Jack and Igave Champion and their son, Penthouse. Donny is a singer and preacher; at one of his concerts, the crowd kills Penthouse.
8. *Dionysus in 69* (1968), by Richard Schechner and The Performance Group. This bloody, sexually explicit adaptation follows the *muthos* of *Bacchae* freely yet clearly. The dialogue scenes become stages in Dionysus and Pentheus' erotic entanglement. The choral songs become ritualistic interruptions of orgiastic sexuality, including a 'birth ritual', a 'death ritual'

- and an 'ecstasy dance', all performed nude at one stage or other in the play's performance history; and a group 'caress' of audience members.
9. *Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party* (1968), by James K. Baxter, a major New Zealand poet. An itinerant Irish dance teacher, Tom O'Dwyer, arrives in suburban New Zealand and starts a women's dance group which disrupts the locals' apparent complacency. The Pentheus-figure of the play, John Ennis (whom O'Dwyer has got roaring drunk), interrupts one of the group's dance practices only to be surrounded, taunted, and ridden like a donkey by his wife until he suffers a back injury.
 10. *The Disorderly Women* (1969), by English playwright and novelist John Bowen. This pessimistic adaptation, set in a modern Thebes, rebuts utopian readings of *Bacchae*. Bowen updates Thebes to a bureaucracy-ridden liberal democracy and Pentheus to its reasonable, overly tolerant king (in the Harold Wilson mould) facing an influx of hippies. Dionysus runs wild as a vaguely Eastern guru who takes hallucinogenic mushrooms. In its second half, *The Disorderly Women* follows *Bacchae* scene for scene; there is no chorus.
 11. *Rites* (1969), by English novelist, poet and playwright Maureen Duffy. In a women's bathroom, various female characters enumerate their problems with men; toy with an anatomically correct male toddler doll; and eventually murder an androgynous woman, whom they have mistaken for a man, in a frenzy of group violence.
 12. *Ritual 2378* (1972), by South African playwright Ian Ferguson: a concise, selective paraphrase which relocates the basic plot, overall structure and characters (including chorus) of Euripides' *Bacchae* to an unspecified location at an unspecified time.³⁶ Ferguson introduces a fair amount of stage business. Most notably, Agaue and the 'WOMEN' dismember and kill Pentheus in a sacrificial ritual.
 13. *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (1973), by Nigerian Nobel Prize winner, poet and playwright Wole Soyinka. Soyinka locates *Bacchae* in an Africanized Greece, with Thebes a slave-owning colonial power and Dionysus a political revolutionary. In the concluding 'communion rite', Agaue drinks blood which spurts from Pentheus' severed head.
 14. *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986), a postmodern feminist adaptation by Caryl Churchill and David Lan. *A Mouthful of Birds* is a collage. Of thirty-two

sections, ten feature Dionysus (sometimes doubled as ‘Dionysus 1’ and ‘Dionysus 2’), and he dances at the beginning and ending. In some sections, Pentheus possesses Derek, Agaue possesses Doreen, or both; and they act scenes from *Bacchae*. Section Fifteen (‘Dancing’) also features some Euripidean material, while ‘The Dressing of Pentheus’ and ‘The Death of Pentheus’ complete the process by which *Bacchae* itself ‘possesses’ *A Mouthful of Birds*.

15. *The Bacchae 2.1* (1993), by Charles Mee, pioneer of ‘(re)making’ classic plays. *The Bacchae 2.1* interleaves a loose, colloquial updating with text recycled from various modern sources, including the *SCUM Manifesto* and Georges Bataille. Agaue murders Pentheus onstage; Dionysus closes the play dancing slowly, like a dervish, with a snake draped over his shoulders.
16. *The Bacchae: A Tragedy in One Act* (2004), by Carl Grose, Anna Maria Murphy and Emma Rice, an adaptation developed for Kneehigh Theatre, an international company based in Cornwall. The Kneehigh Theatre *Bacchae* loosely updates Euripides’ text into a seriocomic, anachronistic, anarchist tour de force.
17. *Euripides: Bacchae* (2010), a ‘new version’ by English translator and adaptor Mike Poulton. Set in mythical Thebes, Poulton’s play follows *Bacchae* scene for scene and ode for ode. But its main concerns are contemporary. Dionysus seeks to reform liberal–democratic Western society. He explicitly opposes war, brutality, oppression, pride, apathy, greed, climate change and so on. And in an odd rejection of the Nietzschean system, Dionysus is more than once named as an ally of Apollo, ‘The Lord of Light’.
18. *Hūrai* (2011), by New Zealand playwright Harry Love. *Hūrai* (Māori for ‘Jews’) dramatizes a violent intercultural encounter between missionaries and indigenous Māori in nineteenth-century New Zealand. *Hūrai* is about a Māori prophet (based on attested historical figures), but it is ‘hung’ on Euripides’ *Bacchae* as though on a ‘hanger’.³⁷ Each character has their counterpart in *Bacchae*; *Hūrai* is structured in parallel, scene for scene and ode for ode. The chorus performs Māori dances, songs and chants. A reporting figure narrates the offstage beheading of the Pentheus-character, the missionary Thomas Keene.

The 'long sixties' (1958 to 1974) saw swift, radical change all over the world.³⁸ At first blush, it might seem that *Bacchae* was *the* tragedy, and Dionysus *the* god, of the era. Of eighteen published English-language adaptations of *Bacchae* since 1866, eleven date from the long sixties, including no fewer than seven between 1966 and 1969. Of 102 productions listed on the APGRD database from 1900 to 1979, 70 per cent date from the 1960s and 1970s. Many commentators describe the play explicitly in terms of revolution.³⁹ In *Sexual Personae* (1990), Camille Paglia insists that:

The *Bacchae* disfigures society's Apollonian constructions. Dionysus is nature's raw sex and violence. He is drugs, drink, dance – the dance of death. My generation of the Sixties may be the first since antiquity to have had so direct an experience of Dionysus. The *Bacchae* is our story, a panorama of intoxication, delusion, and self-destruction. Rock music is the naked power of Dionysus as Bromios, 'the Thunderer.' In the *Bacchae*, Apollonian sky-cult and political authority are bankrupt. Society is in its late or decadent phase.⁴⁰

Bacchae was not absent from the stage in the first half of the century. Murray's translation (Chapter 3) was staged in 1908. Thirty other productions and adaptations followed before 1960. Perhaps what matters is not so much the decade as the century; perhaps Dionysus is *the* Greek god of the twentieth century and *Bacchae* its play. But other Greek tragedies including *Medea*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Antigone* and *Agamemnon* have better claims even to that title in terms of sheer popularity. More to the point, *Bacchae* had already begun its return to favour in the nineteenth century.

In fact, APGRD data support some surprising yet entirely reasonable conclusions:

Bacchae did have a presence on the world stage in the first half of the twentieth century;

Bacchae is not one of the half-dozen most frequently performed Greek tragedies overall;

certain other Greek tragedies were significantly more popular before, during, and even after the 1960s and 1970s;

in the 1960s and 1970s, *Bacchae* gained in absolute and relative popularity to become one of Euripides' best-known plays.

Neither Dionysus nor Euripides can in all seriousness be considered major socio-historical forces of the twentieth century. (Neither the index to Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of Extremes* nor that to Arthur Marwick's *The Sixties* includes an entry for 'Euripides' or 'Dionysus', let alone '*Bacchae*'.⁴¹) It makes better sense to reverse the terms and emphasize the significance of the twentieth century and the long sixties for Dionysus, Euripides and the reception of the play. After a long hiatus, *Bacchae* flourished for a second time in the twentieth century. Its modern heyday proper began in the 1960s and 1970s and continued thereafter. This period also witnessed a slew of English-language adaptations, with more to come.

In *Dionysus Resurrected*, Fischer-Lichte proposes an attractive explanation for the popularity of *Bacchae* in the mid-to-late twentieth century: globalization. In Fischer-Lichte's view, performances of *Bacchae* worldwide from the 1960s responded to globalization by performing three general functions associated with Dionysus: 'they celebrated liberation and communality, destabilized the cultural identity of their spectators, and performed a productive encounter or destructive clash of cultures.'⁴² Clearly, numerous performances featuring Dionysus have directly or indirectly addressed globalization, community, identity and culture. *Dionysus in 69* openly sought new expressions of community and identity. From 1978, Tadashi Suzuki's world-famous, peripatetic *Bacchae* staged an intercultural encounter between Greek, Japanese and other theatrical traditions. Theodoros Terzopoulos's notorious production contested national identity and the 'Greekness' of Greek culture.

Even the small handful of translations in this book demonstrates, however, that there is more to *Bacchae* than globalization. Gilbert Murray's pre-First World War translation, which reinvigorated the play's afterlife, has nothing to do with globalization. Nor do H.D.'s choruses. Mahon's 1991 translation says more about tragedy and comedy; Teevan's 2002 translation says more about geopolitics and religion. Greig's 2007 translation, far from facing up to global matters, playfully embraces all the glitz, glamour and navel-gazing that late capitalism has to offer. And Carson's esoteric 2015 translation turns inward to redefine 'the *daimonic*' as a psychological phenomenon.

The most famous modern adaptation of *Bacchae* is *Dionysus in 69*, by pioneering director Richard Schechner and The Performance Group. Performed dozens of times in New York and elsewhere over a long 1968–9 run, this play is a landmark in theatre history and classical reception. And just as

Bacchae has become a touchstone for tragedy, *Dionysus in 69* has become a touchstone for a particular brand of classical reception: radical, explicit and irreverent. The text, much of which is recycled from William Arrowsmith's 1959 translation, eroticizes the plot of *Bacchae*, sexing up both dialogue scenes and choral songs and channelling counter-culture through sexual liberation. *Dionysus in 69* also went against the tide of then-current opinion by making Pentheus an antagonist (not victim) and Dionysus a hero (not villain) for the ages. In so doing, it set terms for the reception of *Bacchae* which still hold: sex and gender, counter-culture and political revolution.

Dionysus in 69 remains a model for sex- and gender-inflected *Bacchae* adaptations, but Dionysian sexual revolution does not always turn out well for everyone. *Suddenly Last Summer*, written in a less permissive era, problematizes homoerotic desire and heteronormative society in a fable about mother-child relationships, repression and the divided self. Speaking names signify both sexual purity and immorality: Holly echoes 'holy'; Sebastian roughly means 'venerable'; and Venable, as well as echoing 'venerable', suggests venality and, via Latin *venabulum* ('hunting spear'), hunting. Maureen Duffy's *Rites* interrogates the darker side of sexual liberation from a feminist perspective. Just as these women (most of whom appear repressed and all of whom are literally underground) unite in solidarity to resist patriarchy, they kill another woman for transgressing their own restrictive gender norms. James K. Baxter's *Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party* debunks sexual liberation from a male, bourgeois perspective: John Ennis's affair with a younger woman disappoints him, yet his wife's Dionysian dancing leaves him bed-ridden. And in Ian Ferguson's *Ritual 2378*, before any dialogue, the 'WOMEN' capture a young man, strip him naked and abduct him; stage directions describe this as 'a game for the women but not for the young man'. Later, Dionysus says, '*When two are made one, when the outer is as the inner, when male and female form a single one so that the male will not be male and the female not female, then you shall enter the kingdom.*' Later still, the women kill Pentheus onstage with Agaue 'taking the lead'. Ferguson's stage directions indicate that 'there is at all times an element of the erotic in their behaviour'; 'gradually they become possessed'; and '[t]he whole sequence must suggest ritual as old as man's time.'⁴³

Bacchae has been adopted as a master-text of counter-culture, firstly in *Dionysus in 69* and then in productions such as André Gregory's 1969 'hippie

version' at Yale University.⁴⁴ Other adaptations view counter-culture differently. *Gentle Jack* promotes bland self-actualization for restrained Englishmen. Orton's roughly contemporary play *The Erpingham Camp* explodes English reserve into Bacchanalian farce. Similarly, *A Refined Look at Existence* combines theatre of ideas with satirical burlesque to yet again critique mid-1960s spiritual drought. Only *The Disorderly Women* takes a conservative line: irrational violence is endemic everywhere; even liberal democracies must resist Dionysian influences; flower power, if left to go to seed, grows into dystopia. Finally, Poulton's optimistic, pro-Dionysus *Bacchae* is a belated retort which advocates tolerance, compassion and pacifism in a post-9/11, climate-change era. Dionysus says: 'I've watched you, observing from some badly-crafted sofa / the slaughter of many a city – / seeing at a distance flesh stripped from the children's bones ... Listen! The earth is groaning at your stubbornness.'⁴⁵

Though not without its critics, Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (1973) inspired a cottage industry of postcolonial adaptations. Roy Travis's opera *The Black Bacchantes* (1982) used West African instruments and dance rhythms. Conall Morrison's play *The Bacchae of Baghdad* (2006) located Dionysus (in dreadlocks and an orange jumpsuit) and Pentheus (in military fatigues) in wartime Iraq, effectively reading *Bacchae* as a play about modern-day imperialism. Harry Love's intercultural adaptation *Hūrai* (2011) even transplanted *Bacchae* to nineteenth-century, missionary-era New Zealand.

Bacchae does not stage Pentheus' death in the *mise en scène*. It is nevertheless a deeply violent play which problematizes the aestheticization of bloodshed.⁴⁶ In turn, the emphasis on *sparagmos* has much to do with the play's enduring popularity. A bloody sixteenth-century fresco in the Camera del Cardinale in the Palazzo Farnese in Rome attributed to Daniele da Volterra, for example, explicitly depicts Pentheus' death. So does the sketch on the cover of this book. Playwrights, especially those working in the short twentieth century, have likewise tended to see Pentheus' death as an ideological flashpoint. Even the comedies *Pentheus: A Burlesque* and *Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party* include metaphorical *sparagmoi*, narrated and enacted respectively. In some adaptations, a reporting figure narrates an offstage death as in Euripides' *Bacchae*. Other plays go so far as to stage violent death, typically in a *mêlée*. Some even contravene Greek theatrical convention by enacting a *sparagmos* onstage. This

last group includes *The Bassarids* (onstage but obscured), *Dionysus in 69*, *Ritual 2378*, *A Mouthful of Birds* and the Kneehigh Theatre *Bacchae*.⁴⁷

In certain places and at certain times, then, people have evidently used *Bacchae* to think about globalization and related matters. It is also clear that *Bacchae* can be adapted into a new play about almost any ideological conflict one can imagine. One first-rate adaptation of recent times was Andrew Rissik's intelligent, well-written and impeccably acted BBC radio-drama, *Dionysus* (broadcast 2003). In *Dionysus*, the first play in a trilogy about the roots of Christianity, Rissik advances a clear, compelling agenda. Starting from the premise that Dionysus was a proto-Christ and that Dionysus' cult was a real religion with real adherents, he frames *Bacchae* as a play about God. In that respect, *Dionysus* resembles Jean Cocteau's *Bacchus* (1951). But whereas Cocteau takes *Bacchae* as an intertext, Rissik uses it as a hypotext. With unfashionable conviction and considerable intellectual heft, *Dionysus* meets Euripides on his own pre-modern terms.

The Kneehigh Theatre *Bacchae* (2004) exuberantly tests the limits and possibilities of ancient and modern theatre. The plot and structure loosely follow *Bacchae*, but the resemblance lies in broad-brush strokes rather than details; the play is chock-full of ideas and motifs, more even than *Dionysus in 69*. There is cross-dressing, sex, drinking, music and dancing. Chorus-members wear tutus and make newspaper *thursoi*.⁴⁸ The *sparagmos* takes place onstage. Ultimately, the writers treat *Bacchae* as a classic which is solid enough, capacious enough and good enough to take whatever is thrown at it.

More recently still, Ché Walker's musical *The Lightning Child* (2013) wove a main plot adapted from *Bacchae* into a framing scene set on the moon, with Neil Armstrong listening to the story of Dionysus and Pentheus; other scenes featured heroin addicts, a Billie Holiday fan, Caster Semenya, and Holiday herself. In this way, *The Lightning Child* refused one-to-one adaptation but also eschewed the allegorical tit-for-tat of, say, *Revelation in the Courthouse Park*. With subplots referring to drugs, music, gender and mortality, *The Lightning Child* was as much social commentary as it was adaptation or appropriation.

Euripides' *Bacchae* is a brilliant play; it is extremely violent; it features a superstar god. And while globalization may have hastened the play's rise in fortunes, the story becomes more complicated when we look beyond the Dionysus-dramas sampled in *Dionysus Resurrected*. 'Revolution,' writes

Hobsbawm, 'was the child of twentieth-century war'.⁴⁹ As my survey of adaptations demonstrates, the modern status of Euripides' *Bacchae* is a consequence not only of globalization, but also of the fact that it can be interpreted and adapted in terms of violent revolution. (Compare Sampatakakis's suggestive claim that the text anticipates modern performance techniques.) Dionysus arrives; bloodshed follows; Pentheus dies; Cadmus and Agaue go into exile; Dionysus establishes his cult. Or, schematically: a religious crisis sparks a revolution in which a radical foreigner destroys a conservative local.

If anything, the necessary and sufficient conditions for appreciating *Bacchae* in the modern era are the two constants of the short twentieth century: mass violence and mass social upheaval. As Hobsbawm puts it:

Mankind survived. Nevertheless, the great edifice of nineteenth-century civilisation crumpled in the flames of world war, as its pillars collapsed. There is no understanding the Short Twentieth Century without it. It was marked by war. It lived and thought in terms of world war, even when the guns were silent and the bombs were not exploding.

And further:

[T]he global human catastrophe unleashed by the Second World War is almost certainly the largest in human history. Not the least tragic aspect of this catastrophe is that humanity has learned to live in a world in which killing, torture and mass exile have become everyday experiences which we no longer notice.⁵⁰

This is the backdrop against which so many twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers, writers, directors and performers have used *Bacchae* and 'Dionysus' to represent and interpret ideological conflict.

Whither now? The New Zealand playwright Robert Gilbert has picked up where *Dionysus in 69*, *Rites* and *A Mouthful of Birds* left off in *Trans Tasmin* (2013): a didactic, realist play about transgender identity set in the modern day and interwoven with elements from *Bacchae*. In 2015, a Greek–New Zealand production company announced 'The Māori *Bacchae*': a musical version of *Bacchae*, with a specially commissioned Māori translation as its text; combining Greek, European and indigenous New Zealand traditions; performed in Māori with English and Modern Greek surtitles; originally intended to be staged in Crete in 2016 in commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Battle

of Crete, one of many engagements in the Second World War in which the 28th (Māori) Battalion fought.⁵¹ (I have already observed that Harry Love wove Māori chant, song and dance into *Hūrai*, a New Zealand adaptation of *Bacchae*, in 2011; the New Zealand playwright Philip Mann had likewise woven Māori performance elements into Euripides' *Trojan Women* some time before.⁵²) And when the Victoria Ancient Theatre Society staged *Bacchae* in 2015, the student production team independently made a number of significant, resonant staging decisions. As in *A Mouthful of Birds*, the character of Dionysus was split between two actors. As in *Rites*, women attacked a male doll. As in so many adaptations and productions, the *sparagmos* took place onstage. *Plus ça change* ...

Dionysus, Lord and Saviour

Gilbert Murray, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1902)

Well before the long sixties, *Bacchae* had already attracted the attention of someone who could make or break a Greek tragedy: the classical scholar, and eventually Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, Gilbert Murray. One of the finest English Hellenists of his generation, Murray was a textual critic, literary scholar, aspiring poet, man of the theatre and much else. He edited the complete plays of Euripides and Aeschylus for the Oxford Classical Texts (OCT) series. He wrote numerous books on Greek culture and literature which, though seldom cited by professional classicists today, were important and influential in their own time and remain eminently readable. Most importantly, he was a prodigious translator of classical texts.¹ And in 1902, he published his first volume of translations, *Euripides: translated into English rhyming verse by Gilbert Murray*, containing Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Euripides' *Hippolytus*, and *Bacchae*.² Translation united his interests in a common enterprise: using English poetry to share the ineffable beauty, and the universal human(ist) wisdom, which he found in Greek tragedy, most of all Euripides. In effect, Murray was the first English scholar to treat Euripides' plays as living, breathing verse dramas rather than schoolroom artefacts.³ Furthermore, though he translated and wrote about many Greek plays, his influence can be seen most clearly in the reception of *Bacchae*.⁴

I have already observed that Murray's translation looms over the play's modern afterlife. The details are worth rehearsing. We know of a first performance of *Bacchae* at the Dionysia festival in Athens in the late fifth century BC. In the early second century BC, one Satyrus of Samos, a famous piper and singer, performed a song entitled 'Dionysus' and a lyre solo from Euripides' *Bacchae* at Delphi.⁵ Excerpts were performed for the Parthian king

in the first century BC and by the emperor Nero in the first century AD. But after that? Silence. Until 1908, that is, when *Bacchae* finally ascended the English stage for the first time, at the Royal Court Theatre in London, with William Poel directing and Lillah McCarthy playing Dionysus, using Gilbert Murray's script. According to the APGRD database, the 1908 Murray–Poel *Bacchae* was the earliest recorded modern production of the play in *any language*.⁶ The show fizzled; Murray vetoed it after only two matinées.⁷ But it still cleared the way to other stages both amateur and commercial. And given the play's previous absence from the modern stage, it is worth asking what Murray saw in *Bacchae* that others did not.

For a comparison in terms of popularity, historical significance and influence, one need look no further than his *Oedipus*.⁸ In 1912, Max Reinhardt staged *Oedipus, King of Thebes*, translated by Murray from Sophocles' Greek, at the Royal Opera House, following a spectacular German production of Hofmannsthal's version. Reinhardt's landmark *Oedipus*, like its German predecessor, thrilled audiences.⁹ According to Fiona Macintosh, moreover, 'the significance of the London production cannot be fully grasped without reference to its immediate prehistory'.¹⁰ Despite only referring to incest obliquely and never enacting murder, suicide or self-mutilation onstage, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* had become entangled in contemporary censorship debates; the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays had for some years been censoring it on the grounds of obscenity. Reinhardt's *Oedipus* only became possible in the first place when Murray's translation was finally granted a licence for performance in 1910. But plays about Oedipus had already been performed on British stages. As recently as 1893, Jean Mounet-Sully had starred in the Comédie Française production of Jules Lacroix's French *Oidipe-Roi* at Drury Lane in London, while *Oedipus Tyrannus* was the Cambridge Greek Play in 1887 and would be again in 1912. Ultimately, Murray's *Oedipus Tyrannus* is notable more for the historical context in which it was first licensed and performed than for any enduring influence, cultural significance, or originality as a literary translation per se.

Murray's *Bacchae*, however, was unprecedented, and it left a considerable legacy. For one thing, various choral works draw English text from it: Ernest Walker's *Hymn to Dionysus* (1906), Gustav Holst's *Hymn to Dionysus* (1913), Muriel Talbot Hodge's *The Fawn Song: A Chorus from the Bacchae* (1937), and

Granville Bantock's *Five Choral Songs and Dances from the Bacchae* (1945). Murray's *Oedipus* enjoyed no such fame.

In 1944, Murray's successor as Regius Professor, E. R. Dodds, published what is in effect the standard English commentary on *Bacchae*. Dodds's preface pays tribute to Murray's lectures on the play, lectures which had presumably grown from and made use of the translation and accompanying notes:

Lastly, I must thank Professor Murray, to whose lectures on the *Bacchae* I, like so many others, owe my first real understanding of the play's greatness and of its religious background. All of this book is ultimately his: a part of it he made [i.e. the Greek text from Murray's OCT edition, reprinted in Dodds's commentary]; the rest grew from seed he planted thirty years ago.¹¹

The *Bacchae* translation inspired new theatrical works, including George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* (1905). Shaw acknowledges his debt in a note:

N. B. The Euripidean verses in the second act of *Major Barbara* are not by me, or even directly by Euripides. They are by Professor Gilbert Murray, whose English version of *The Bacchae* came into our dramatic literature with all the impulsive power of an original work shortly before *Major Barbara* was begun. The play, indeed, stands indebted to him in more ways than one.¹²

Shaw based the character of Adolphus Cusins on Murray; Cusins quotes the aforementioned 'Euripidean verses in the second act' directly from Murray's *Bacchae*. Most importantly, *Major Barbara* adapts *Bacchae* and *Frogs*, two plays which Murray had published together in his first-ever volume of translations.¹³

Wole Soyinka's 1973 adaptation, *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*, likewise draws on Murray's *Bacchae*:

A twenty-year rust on my acquaintanceship with classical Greek made it necessary for me to rely heavily on previous translations for this adaptation of *The Bacchae*. Two versions which deserve especial mention, in that I have not hesitated to borrow phrases and even lines from them, are those by Gilbert Murray ... and William Arrowsmith ...¹⁴

Though Arrowsmith's translation was newer, Soyinka borrowed more from Murray, not only phrasing but also ritualism, pagan-Christian syncretism and the theme of liberation.¹⁵

Murray wrote in a high Victorian manner, emulating Swinburne for lyric and William Morris for dialogue. Though his translations are not especially well regarded today, he did produce good lyric poetry on occasion. (One justifiably well-known ode from Murray's translation of Euripides' *Hippolytus* contains the oft-quoted phrase 'The apple-tree, the singing, and the gold'.¹⁶) The *Bacchae* translation has been singled out for special praise, especially its choral odes. One critic, sensitive to Murray's translations as dramatic poetry, asserts that in the 'terrifying' choral lyrics at *Bacchae* 977–1023, 'the translator had achieved considerable, if inevitably partial, success with one of the most extraordinarily powerful passages in Greek tragedy'.¹⁷ One of his biographers describes the *Bacchae* choruses as 'some of his most successful Swinburnian verse'.¹⁸ Murray was far from the first to translate *Bacchae*; but he did give this play, genteelly attired in pretty verse, its proper English debut.

The well-known first strophe (stanza) of the ode at *Bacchae* 862–911 is a good illustration of what Murray could do with Euripides' Greek. First, a crib:

Will I ever stamp my pale feet in all-night ecstatic dances again? Ever throw
my head back into the dewy air?

Bacch. 862–5

Now Murray:

Will they ever come to me, ever again,
The long long dances,
On through the dark till the dawn-stars wane?
Shall I feel the dew on my throat, and the stream
Of wind in my hair? Shall our white feet gleam
In the dim expanses?

51

Irregular alliteration, half-rhyme and assonance produce a verbal music which is more theme-and-variations than slavish metronomic exercise: 'long long ... dark ... dawn-stars ... feel ... dew ... wind ... white feet ... dim'; 'white feet gleam'; 'In ... dim'. The weight falls on the two short lines. The emphatic triad 'long long dances' uses monosyllables, liquid and nasal consonants and heavy clusters at word boundaries (*ng-l*, *ng-d*) to slow the previous line's anapaestic momentum before landing on 'dances' as though on the last step before a tableau. The parallel phrase 'dim expanses', with its near-double rhyme on

‘dances’, then widens the song’s scope past the night sky and into the unknowable (‘dim’) psychic realms reached in Dionysiac dancing. Murray convincingly distils the ode’s twin subjects (ecstatic dancing and communion with the divine through nature) without banality or syncretism. As a poem–translation, this is a success.

Compare Murray’s translation of Dionysus’ opening lines:

Behold, God’s Son is come unto this land
 Of Thebes, even I, Dionysus, whom the brand
 Of heaven’s hot splendour lit to life, when she
 Who bore me, Cadmus’ daughter Semelê,
 Died here. So, changed in shape from God to man,
 I walk again by Dircê’s streams and scan
 Ismênus’ shore. There by the castle side
 I see her place, the Tomb of the Lightning’s Bride,
 The wreck of smouldering chambers, and the great
 Faint wreaths of fire undying—as the hate
 Dies not, that Hera held for Semelê.

7

Of special interest here is the way Murray frames Dionysus’ epiphanic entry (see Chapter 1). The very first word sounds a biblical note. ‘Behold’ is the standard English translation of Greek *idou*, Latin *ecce* or Hebrew *hên*. Next, this pre-Christian deity introduces himself as ‘God’s Son’. The capital letters (G and S) in ‘God’s Son’ follow standard practice in English-language Bible translation, Jesus being the ‘Son of God’ (Greek: *huios theou*; Latin: *filius dei*). Like other Greek deities, Dionysus has temporarily taken on human form. Murray, echoing the Nicene Creed (‘was incarnate and was made man’), has him ‘changed in shape from God to man’. This Dionysus is already a Christ figure.

It is a striking beginning for a pagan text. In his introduction, Murray asserts: ‘The *Bacchae*, being from one point of view a religious drama, a kind of “mystery play,” is highly traditional in form and substance’ (80). In *Euripides and His Age* (1913), he again compares *Bacchae* to a mystery play.¹⁹ He translates the final coda in that same spirit: ‘There be many shapes of mystery / And many things God makes to be, / Past hope or fear’ (79).²⁰ More than any of his other translations, in fact, Murray’s *Bacchae* consistently uses Christian

language to express Greek theology, overlaying polytheism with Trinitarian Christianity. This syncretism leads to a tension between classical form and post-classical content, a tension all the more jarring because Murray himself claimed to put content ahead of form in translation.²¹ In short, Murray's translation popularizes Euripides' *Bacchae* by making it intelligible to an Edwardian audience and shaping it into a proto-Christian passion play; the most important items in his translator's toolkit are theological syncretism and Christian diction.

Bacchae dramatizes a religious crisis. The word *theos* ('god') occurs more times (67) than in any other Euripidean play except *Ion* (105). In *Ion*, however, Murray translates *theos* as 'God' or 'God's' only 12.5 per cent of the time; in *Bacchae* the rate is 40 per cent. Similarly, he capitalizes 'God' throughout *Bacchae* but alternates 'God' and 'god' in *Ion*. Overall, the word 'God' occurs twenty-eight times in the *Ion* translation and forty-four in *Trojan Women* – these are the closest Euripidean examples – but more than fifty times in Murray's *Bacchae*. God even displaces Zeus himself: although Murray translates *Zeus* as 'God' only once in *Bacchae*, he renders the possessive forms of that word, *Dios* and *Zēnos* ('of Zeus'), as 'God' or 'God's' in eight of nineteen cases. Murray's *Bacchae* is as much about God as it is about the gods. Comparing English translations of *Bacchae* by Victorian predecessors, we see that Milman (1865) uses 'God' six times in his *Bacchae*, and Buckley (1850) only once. Buckley delays the singular form until in the closing choral tag, effectively pitting monotheism against polytheism so that 'God' supplants 'the Gods': 'the Gods bring to pass many [things] in an unexpected manner ... God has found a means for doing things unthought for.' Murray, taking up the tune with gusto, describes polytheism in clearly monotheistic terms: 'Strength of God' (52); 'God's high grace' (51).²²

The agnostic Murray goes further than that: his *Bacchae* ultimately maps Dionysiac religion onto specific Christian beliefs. As we have seen, God and His Son are ever-present. The Holy Spirit completes the Trinity; *to daimonion* (the divine) is now the 'Spirit of God' (52). The related word *daimōn* (deity, fate) is Heaven, capital *H*: 'A God of Heaven is he, and born in majesty' (24); 'Heaven's high mysteries' (16); 'First in Heaven's sovranity' (23). The phrase 'flock of the Believing' (12) uses the long-established metaphor of the flock for a Christian community. The phrase 'saint of Dionyse' (53) introduces the Communion of Saints. So far, then, we have Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Church

and Saints, with other elements from the Nicene Creed also represented. 'Glorying to God in the height,' sings Murray's chorus (59). *Et in terra pax ...*

Murray presumes a theological palimpsest. Dionysus ('son of Zeus') in human form is like Christ crucified and Yahweh incarnate. This analogy is clearest in descriptions of Dionysus as the Son of God such as 'God's true Son, Dionyse, in fulness God' (51). Dionysus as 'true God' (9) recalls the Nicene Creed's description of Christ as 'very God from very God' – 'true God' in modern prayer books. Murray embraces the Trinitarian paradox that God's son is God: 'this God [i.e. Dionysus] was knit into God's flesh' (19).

Euripides' play dramatizes divine epiphany and divine vengeance, elements which Murray transubstantiates into incarnation, suffering and passion. 'For this I veil my godhead with the wan / Form of the things that die, and walk as Man' (9). Gods in Greek myth are sometimes wounded, like Aphrodite and Ares in the *Iliad*, Ares in the *Shield of Heracles*, or Dionysus himself in the Orphic theogony. But such episodes ultimately confirm the gulf between human and divine, and *Bacchae* is not an Orphic text. Where Murray writes of the 'wan form of the things that die,' Euripides' Dionysus speaks only of the *eidos thnēton* ('mortal form,' *Bacch.* 53). And although the adjective *thnētos* ('mortal') is related to *thanatos* ('death'), the phrase *eidos thnēton* carries about as much of its etymological baggage in Greek as 'mortified' does in English. When Dionysus reappears in mid-air for the final scene, he is untroubled and literally untouchable. But Murray's Dionysus seems susceptible to gentler passions; as a god who 'walks as Man' clothed in the 'wan form of things that die,' he resembles no one so much as Jesus Christ, Son of Man.

There is more to the palimpsest even than that. The Eucharist is the central, defining element of Christian liturgical worship. Believers consume Christ's body and blood, literally or figuratively depending on denomination and individual belief, in the form of consecrated bread and wine. Murray furnishes Dionysus with a Eucharist of his own. In a note, he maintains that 'Dionysus was the grape and the juice his blood' (82). And further:

A curious relic of superstition and cruelty remained firmly embedded in Orphism – a doctrine irrational and unintelligible, and for that very reason wrapped in the deepest and most sacred mystery: *a belief in the sacrifice of Dionysus himself, and the purification of man by his blood.*

82, emphasis added

Murray misrepresents Orphic beliefs, conflating wine created *by* Dionysus with the blood *of* Dionysus.²³ He translates *botruos ganos* ('grape-gleam', *Bacch.* 382–3) as 'grape-blood' (23). And he has Tiresias make a quite incredible claim:

Yea, being God, the blood of him is set
Before the Gods in sacrifice, that we
For his sake may be blest.

19

Greeks pouring libations to the gods are also, apparently, celebrating Holy Communion; they pour the deity's blood, in a ritual, to obtain his blessing.

Ancient poets occasionally use this metaphor. A fragment of Timotheus' lyric poem *Cyclops* refers to wine as 'the blood of the Bacchic one' (F4.4). A fragment of a play by Thespis describes pouring a libation of 'Bromius' blood' (F4.6). In Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*, when Dionysus invents wine, he uses a vine growing mysteriously from drops of divine blood (*ikhōr*) which have fallen from Olympus (12.293–397). And Pliny the Elder, writing in Latin, cites a letter of Androcydes urging Alexander the Great to drink moderately: 'If you are going to drink wine, sir, remember that you are drinking the blood (*sanguis*) of the earth' (*HN* 14.58). But just as one enjoys a glass or two of 'Bacchus' in Latin, the regular metonym in Greek is not blood (*haima*, *ikhōr*) but 'Dionysus'.

At any rate, Tiresias does not say in Greek that Dionysus' blood is poured out. He says that 'Dionysus himself' (i.e. wine), though 'born a god', is poured out (*Bacch.* 284: *spendetai*). Murray's rendering recalls and may have been influenced by Saint Paul's two metaphorical uses of the same verb in a Christian context to imagine himself as a sacrificial offering made on behalf of other believers.²⁴ In the Authorized Version: 'if I am poured out as an offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith' (Phil. 2.17); 'For I am now ready to be poured out as an offering' (2 Tim. 4.6). But the passive verb *spendesthai*, used concretely or metaphorically, means 'to be poured as a drink-offering', not 'to have one's blood poured out'. Equally, the liturgical-sounding 'For his sake' blurs the Greek phrase *dia touton* ('through him'). It is not 'for the sake of' but rather 'through (the agency of)' Dionysus, as inventor of wine and as wine itself, that libations bring good fortune.²⁵ In *this* religious drama, the image of Dionysus' blood poured out for us in sacrifice is strikingly Eucharistic and misleadingly Christological. Murray's language domesticates the theology of *Bacchae* for

early twentieth-century readers more familiar with Christianity than with Greek religion.

The *Bacchae* use Christian imagery to praise their proto-Christian deity. For example:

Oh, blessèd he in all wise,
 Who hath drunk the Living Fountain,
 Whose life no folly staineth,
 And his soul is near to God;
 Whose sins are lifted, pall-wise;
 As he worships on the Mountain ...

10–11

Compare a literal crib:

A happy (*makar*) man is someone who is prosperous,
 who knows the gods' rites,
 who keeps his life pure,
 and who joins his soul to the group of worshippers
 with sacred purifications
 as he raves ecstatic in the hills.

Bacch. 73–7

The parodos of *Bacchae* approximates a cult hymn for Dionysus. This particular passage contains a *makarismos*: a formula used in mystic initiation along the lines of 'Enviably (*makar*) is the one who does X'. In Greek, this prefigures the Beatitudes, Jesus's famous pronouncements which follow the formula 'Enviably are the X' using the word *makarios*, a derivative of *makar* (Mt. 5.3–11; Lk. 6.20–2). Murray, too, translates *makar* ('fortunate', 'enviable') as 'blessed', just as *makarios* is translated in the Authorized Version.²⁶ But he also loads the *makarismos* with extra baggage: the staining metaphor, sin, the Holy Spirit ('Living Fountain') and the idea of a personal relationship with God Himself. The chorus also alludes to Pentecost elsewhere, calling Bromius ('The Roarer') 'Lord of Many Voices' (23). That is: whoever lives a blameless life without the stain of sin, and receives the Holy Spirit, and draws near to God, his sins forgiven – that man is truly blessed.

Sin is a problem for syncretistic translation. Greek mystery cults essentially sought material prosperity in this life and in the next.²⁷ Murray concludes that

Dionysiac religion 'laid especial stress upon sin and the sacerdotal purification of sin; on the eternal reward due beyond the grave' (81). But fifth-century Athenians did not really have a concept of, or word for, sin.²⁸ Biblical Greek authors do typically use the word *hamartia* for 'sin' (i.e. breaking God's law). In classical Greek, however, *hamartia* means 'error, mistake', with a root meaning of 'missing the mark'. Whereas Euripides' Pentheus admits mistakes (*hamartiai*), Murray's Pentheus confesses sins: 'Let it not befall / Through sin of mine, that thou shouldst slay thy son' (63). More generally, 'sin' and 'sinner' in this translation cover various ancient Greek concepts including impiety (27), violence (32), impurity (37), criminal actions (61) and folly (74). Pentheus and Dionysus also accuse each other of 'blasphemy' (18, 29) – in the Greek: 'violence' (*Bacch.* 247: *hubris*) and 'impiety' (*Bacch.* 476: *asebeia*). Such moral terminology cumulatively loads *Bacchae* with Christian values.

Biblical tropes also obtrude. In the Bible, sight and blindness can represent faith and unbelief; here they are metaphors for sanity and madness.²⁹ In another metaphor, Jesus is the Seed of David; the Gospel is a seed sown by God.³⁰ Murray's Dionysus, described in Greek as the 'divine son of a god', becomes 'God-seed of God the Sower' (11). Biblical writers also describe sin as a 'seed' which one 'reaps'; a 'hard' man is one who 'sows' and 'reaps' carelessly (Gal. 6.7; Mt. 25.24).³¹ Murray's Dionysus borrows both metaphors: 'Hard heart, how little dost thou know what seed thou sowest!' (22). All in all, Murray uses biblical tropes, hymnal language, liturgical imagery, Anglo-Catholic vocabulary and even capital letters (God, Son) to make sense of Euripides' *Bacchae*. In so doing, he alludes not only to Father, Son, Holy Spirit and the Church, but also, *inter alia*, to incarnation, passion, sin, Eucharist, forgiveness and even redemption. Presented like this, in English packaging, *Bacchae* dramatizes a proto-Christian fable.

This fable carries expectations which cannot be met. In particular, the idea of Dionysus as a suffering messiah saving penitents is incompatible with the play's denouement. There is no resurrection or ascension; Pentheus stays dead. We do hear confession and repentance, oddly enough: 'we have sinned' (76); 'we have confessed' (77). But Dionysus, speaking from the stage building as though enthroned in Heaven, does not absolve Cadmus and Agaue: 'Ye mocked me, being God; this is your wage' (77). Paraphrasing Saint Paul, he ignores the all-important second half of the relevant verse: 'For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Rom. 6.23).

Despite vigorous prodding, *Bacchae* cannot make room for key elements of Christian doctrine and praxis: atonement, baptism, salvation, bodily resurrection and so on. In the end, Murray's translation remains an unfinished passion play which cannot cope with God's grace – with 'the gift of God [which] is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord'.

There were of course other, secular graces available to a politically engaged, agnostic Hellenist. In *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*, Frank Turner observes:

The metaphor of Greece opened a humanistic path toward the secular – a path along which most traditional religious landmarks were absent but from which other traditional values still able to address the problems of society and art could be dimly perceived.³²

Although familiar with the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, Murray opposed organized religion and felt an 'indirect revulsion against Christianity'.³³ Translation aside, his interpretation of *Bacchae* is not bound up in syncretism or Christian parallels, unlike other accounts of the matter such as George Seaver's pamphlet *The Dionysus-Cult in its Relation to Christianity, as seen in the Bacchae of Euripides* (1914).³⁴ It is worth asking: if not Christ, who or what is the Son of God?

Others noticed Christian elements in Murray's *Bacchae*. A critical *Times* review of the first performance insists that Murray and Poel (the director) had ironed out the play's wrinkles and simplified questions which 'force themselves upon the reader in his arm-chair':

The theatre can certainly be a valuable means of simplification. The *Bacchae*, it is well known, is the most puzzling, or at any rate the most hotly discussed, play in all the extant Greek drama ... Yesterday's performance at the Court was in no way a remarkable display of histrionic intelligence or power, and yet it simplified things sufficiently to give us the *Bacchae*, or at any rate a *Bacchae*, that was perfectly clear and straightforward.³⁵

The reviewer goes on to critique various aspects of the production before coming to Lillah McCarthy's Dionysus:

Rather too humble a Dionysus, perhaps; indeed, at moments almost a sentimental Dionysus. But it is easy to see where that idea comes from, for it is well known that Dr. Murray has lost no opportunity of bringing out what

resemblances there may be between the case of Dionysus in the *Bacchae* and the case of the Founder of Christianity.³⁶

So, then: Murray's translation of *Bacchae* 'simplifies' Euripides for performance; resemblances between Jesus and Dionysus, especially as played by Lillah McCarthy, are fundamental to simplifying the play. Indeed, when Murray vetoed the 1908 production after two performances, he did so not only because it was too static, but also because the director had rationalized *Bacchae* by cutting out its mystical elements.³⁷

In his often hilarious essay 'Euripides and the Greek Genius', John Jay Chapman praises 'Murray the critical scholar, whose work has an imaginative, stimulating value to the student of Greek' but criticizes 'Murray the author of poetic translations ... whose work is essentially non-critical, even anti-critical, and who fulfils to the student of Greek literature the office of an *ignis fatuus*.'³⁸ The real problem is that these translations 'are used as an introduction to Greek literature' such that the author of poetic translations undoes the good work of the critical scholar.³⁹ Before quoting the famous lines from *Hippolytus*, Chapman does acknowledge that 'Gilbert Murray the poet has a note, a charm, a lyric gift of his own.'⁴⁰ But he then goes on to say:

This is very charming, but not very Greek ... Of course all mythology deals with gods; and by translating every reference to Olympus with a big G, this school has produced some very interesting literary flavours. Religion is their pet thought. They are not satisfied unless they have stitched Greek religion (whatever it was) and English religion (whatever it ought to be) into some sort of harmony. In their works the Bible is subtly alluded to through the use of biblical words, and Dionysus and Christ are delicately jumbled.⁴¹

And finally:

It was Robert Browning who first cast 'God' into British Victorian poetry – 'God' as a sort of pigment or colophon; 'God' as an exclamation, a parenthesis, an adverb, a running comment, an exordium, a thesis, and a conclusion. Murray inherits this idiosyncrasy: he has taken it in with his poetic milk.⁴²

Chapman raises important points. Contemporary readers and listeners did recognize the Christian language; it came bundled in British poetic tradition. But did Murray adopt it merely by reflex? Murray the poet and Murray the interpreter are one and the same persona between the covers of his Euripides.

Chapman also calls the introductions and notes old-fashioned and concludes, 'It is incredible, and a paradox in psychology, that Murray the scholar should have penned these notes.'⁴³ It would have been paradoxical for Murray *not* to have penned such notes, for it was fundamental to his humanistic goals that he use translation *and* scholarship to share the Greek inheritance with Greekless readers. James Morwood is right to read these translations as a unity of preface, translation, stage directions and commentary:

The totality of Murray's introductions and translations is what counts. Just as his friend Bernard Shaw made enormous use of his prefaces and stage directions, so Murray dressed the bare bones of his versions in a commentary that memorably fixed their uniqueness and originality on the modern stage.⁴⁴

Murray was first and foremost a Hellenist; his Hellenism was as practical and political as it was scholarly.⁴⁵ He found a worthy ally in Euripides: 'I almost feel that [Euripides] expresses my own feelings and beliefs: rational, liberal, humane, feminist.'⁴⁶ On the other hand: '[Euripides]' general spirit is clear: it is a spirit of liberation, of moral revolt, of much denial; but it is also a spirit of search and wonder and surmise. He was not in any sense a "mere" rationalist.'⁴⁷ Euripides 'brings things under the great magic of ... something that we can think of as eternity or the universal or perhaps even as Memory'.⁴⁸ Murray's Euripides, like his Hellenism, is progressive and retrospective, radical and conservative. 'In the end, perhaps,' he writes, 'this two-sidedness remains as the cardinal fact about Euripides: he is a merciless realist; he is the greatest master of imaginative music ever born in Attica.'⁴⁹

Chapman distinguishes scholarship from translation. It makes better sense to distinguish professional academic Hellenism from amateur political Hellenism, and Murray the scholar-critic-translator from Murray the Liberal secular humanist. Euripides appealed to both, and translation brought both to bear on Euripides, the 'merciless realist' and 'master of imaginative music'. Heroic couplets, Swinburnian lyrics, Christian elements, introduction, notes, and everything in between, are intended to resuscitate the 'rational, liberal, humane, feminist' ideals which Murray thought he shared with Euripides; and, at the same time, to bring Euripidean poetry to a wider audience. The result may seem to us old-fashioned or naïve, but Murray's *Bacchae* was progressive

for its time, and translating Dionysus in Christian terms was not merely a poetic reflex. Murray's proto-Christian mystery play is grounded in a substantive, albeit idiosyncratic, interpretation. First: *Bacchae* illustrates the 'ritualist' theory of Greek tragedy, namely, that it developed out of ancient ritual. And second: more than any other ancient play, *Bacchae* promotes humanist values.

Murray publicly aligned himself with the so-called Cambridge Ritualists in an 'Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy' in Jane Harrison's *Themis* (1912). In the 'Excursus', he argues that Greek tragedy developed out of annual fertility sacrifices and that surviving plays bear the stamp of that origin. (The fertility-sacrifice theory is out of favour today, though most scholars agree that Greek tragedy originated in some kind of Dionysiac ritual.⁵⁰) Already in 1902, the introduction to Murray's first volume of translations had revealed an interest in ritual. In particular, he reads *Bacchae* as an archetypal ritual drama: 'The old poet chose a severely traditional subject, the primitive ritual play of Dionysus from which Greek tragedy is said to have sprung.'⁵¹ As such, translating *Bacchae* as a kind of mystery play is a way of gesturing towards tragedy's supposed ritual origins.

By definition, Greek religion is not a species of humanism. But Euripides' plays often support humanist interpretations. This is certainly true of *Bacchae*, especially for readers whose values are 'rational, liberal, humane, feminist'. In *Bacchae*, Murray found an archetypal expression of humanism smuggled behind an archetypal expression of Dionysiac piety. This is a paradox, though not an unprecedented one: H. G. Wells, another left-leaning, late-Victorian, utopian agnostic, also praised the teachings of major world religions.⁵² Murray read *Bacchae* as a religious work *and* a poetic distillation of his own ineffable, universal, humanist beliefs. His translation is a vehicle for expressing, *professing*, a rational faith in secular mysteries.

There is another paradox. In Murray's translation, secular ideals are trumpeted most loudly in the choral odes sung by the Bacchae. For example: 'The simple nameless herd of Humanity / Hath deeds and faith that are truth enough for me!' (25).⁵³ Translating to *phauloteron plēthos* ('the ordinary crowd', *Bacch.* 430–1) as 'the simple, nameless herd' is reductive and patronizing. The sentiment smacks of what has been called Murray's 'aristocratic liberalism'.⁵⁴ At the same time, 'nameless herd' is a shade more humane than the Victorian

technical terms ‘underclass’ or ‘residuum’. (Neither the Greek adjective *phaulos* nor the English adjective ‘simple’ is an unambiguously pejorative descriptor.⁵⁵) For Murray, ‘simple’ conjures back-to-basics nostalgia as well as rustic ignorance; ‘nameless’, numerical superiority as well as anonymity; ‘herd’, community as well as servility or brutishness. In any case, it is the ‘deeds’ and ‘faith’ of these unsung heroes that will allow ‘humanity’ privileged access to truth – not academic truth, but ‘truth enough’. Instead of orthodoxy (belief) and orthopraxy (ritual), Murray celebrates practical expertise, common decency and folk wisdom.

What is more, God’s grace is recast as moral progress. In Euripides’ Greek, the chorus’s refrain at *Bacchae* 877–91 calibrates the play’s moral compass by asserting that violent revenge is noble; that gods and men always want what is noble; and that, by implication, Dionysus is justified. Literally: ‘What is wisdom (*to sophon*)? Or what prize could the gods give more noble (*kallion*) in men’s sight than holding your hand victorious over your enemy’s head? What is noble (*kalon*) is always precious (*philon*).’ Murray, listening hard, hears vague strains of goodness, pacifism, reconciliation and beauty:

What else is Wisdom? What of man’s endeavour
Or God’s high grace, so lovely and so great?
To stand from fear set free, to breathe and wait?
To hold a hand uplifted over Hate;
And shall not loveliness be loved for ever?

51

In that same song, Murray’s chorus again celebrates human nature:

And is thy Faith so much to give,
Is it so hard a thing to see,
That the Spirit of God, whate’er it be,
The Law that abides and changes not, ages long,
The Eternal and Nature-born – these things be strong?⁵⁶

52

Throughout *Bacchae*, in fact, Murray clothes the optimistic rhetoric of secular humanism in mystical poetry. Humanity, truth, goodness, tradition, Nature – all lead inexorably to heaven on earth:

But whoe'er can know,
 As the long days go,
 That to live is happy, hath found his Heaven!⁵⁷

53

On these terms, *Bacchae* becomes not only an unfinished passion play but also a profession of faith in the basic human decency of 'simple' people, which is the clearest manifestation of the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth. As Murray wrote in the original introduction:

It is a mysticism which includes democracy as it includes the love of your neighbour. They are both necessary details in the inclusive end. It implies that trust in the 'simple man' which is so characteristic of most idealists and most reformers. It implies the doctrine of Equality – a doctrine essentially religious and mystical, continually disproved in every fresh sense in which it can be formulated, and yet remaining one of the living faiths of men.

...

It is not for us to consider at present how far this doctrine is true, nor even how far it is good or bad. We need only see what the essence of it is. That the end of life is not in the future, not in external objects, not a thing to be won by success or good fortune, nor to be deprived of by the actions of others. Live according to Nature, and Life itself is happiness. The Kingdom of Heaven is within you – here and now. You have but to accept it and live with it – not obscure it by striving and hating and looking in the wrong place.⁵⁸

Democracy, the Golden Rule, and the mystical 'doctrine' of Equality add up to a 'living faith' which Murray maps onto Dionysiac cult. Its tenets are few. The point of life is happiness. Seeking the wrong things, alienating people and trying to get ahead will not make us happy. A simple life, lived 'according to nature', will.

This was not the last time Murray wrote about the Kingdom of Heaven. His 1905 translation of Euripides' *Trojan Women* turns that wartime play into a pacifist condemnation of the Boer War and, at the same time, a celebration of military heroism.⁵⁹ The introduction returns to the Kingdom of Heaven:

Pity is a rebel passion. Its hand is against the strong, against the organised force of society, against conventional sanctions and accepted Gods. It is the Kingdom of Heaven within us fighting against the brute powers of the world;

and it is apt to have those qualities of unreason, of contempt for the counting of costs and the balancing of sacrifices, of recklessness, and even, in the last resort, of ruthlessness, which so often mark the paths of heavenly things and the doings of the children of light. It brings not peace, but a sword.⁶⁰

The highest virtue is now pity, the 'rebel passion' which inspires radical action. We are to promote liberty by championing underdogs 'against the strong', limiting executive power 'against the organised force of society', and extending individual freedoms 'against the brute powers of the world'. The 'children of light' feel pity, one of the 'heavenly things', as an internal, quasi-religious emotion. The Kingdom of Heaven, with its 'qualities of unreason' and 'ruthlessness', includes the irrational. Finally, compassion at any cost is not peace at any price. 'It brings not peace, but a sword.'

What changed? Murray's *Bacchae* is a mystery play. His *Trojan Women* is a war play. The *Bacchae* translation promotes Liberalism with a view to living a happy life. The *Trojan Women* translation argues for something more specific: avoiding wartime atrocities and defending the innocent.⁶¹ Between them, these two plays outline a sort of Liberal manifesto. The Kingdom of Heaven – a flourishing, decent, peaceful life – is there within us for the taking if we want it. When others are suffering, we must fight.

Murray described his methods as follows:

I am bound to confess that, the groundwork of careful translation once laid, I have thought no more about anything but the poetry. I have often laboured long to express a slight shade of meaning or beauty which I felt lurking in some particular word or cadence.⁶²

Poetic translation, in this view, is primarily a work of intuition. It reveals hidden depths and clarifies obscure meanings. But he also saw translation as a work of specifically *political* intuition. He claimed to have 'combined – or tried to combine – an enthusiasm for poetry and Greek scholarship with an almost equal enthusiasm for radical politics and social reform.'⁶³ And in the decades since his *Bacchae*, as later chapters will demonstrate, politics has remained a significant, if at times latent, influence on the play's reception in English.

T. S. Eliot's vitriolic 1920 essay 'Euripides and Professor Murray' spearheaded modern criticism of Murray's Euripides. Eliot pulls no punches: 'Greek poetry

will never have the slightest vitalizing effect upon English poetry if it can only appear masquerading as a vulgar debasement of the eminently personal idiom of Swinburne'; 'it is because Professor Murray has no creative instinct that he leaves Euripides quite dead.'⁶⁴ This is ungentlemanly but not completely off the mark. The same man who wrote 'The apple-tree, the singing, and the gold' also wrote this:

Ho, there, who keeps the gate?—Go, summon me
 Cadmus, Agênor's son, who crossed the sea
 From Sidon and upreared this Theban hold.
 Go, whoso'er thou art. See he be told
 Teiresias seeketh him.

14

Despite its settled place among Eliot's critical canon, however, the essay had little impact on Murray's popularity. He remained the English classical translator *du jour* for some time yet.⁶⁵ Modernist criticism was apparently out of step with popular opinion, at least in 1920. Thereafter, as Peter Burian puts it, 'the large audience for Murray's work serves to remind us that the great majority of theatre-goers and readers in the period between the World Wars remained to be convinced of the triumph of Modernism.'⁶⁶ Maurice Bowra recalled that his former teacher and colleague's translations were 'almost the only new verse in English to command a large sale'; by 1954, worldwide sales of Murray's translations had reached nearly half a million copies.⁶⁷ Accordingly, we would do well to rethink Eliot's essay as Morwood does: 'It surely makes sense to view Eliot's broadside less as an attack on Murray than as the personal manifesto of a poet who some twenty years later was himself to try to bring Greek tragedy to the West End stage.'⁶⁸ The poet-critic extraordinaire and dramatist-in-waiting reacted more than anything to the idea – the effrontery – of a classical scholar writing verse drama. By mastering the form himself, Eliot avoided a charge of hypocrisy.

Murray and Eliot both worked hard to bring verse drama to modern audiences. Yet a chasm yawns between their respective dramatic outputs; 'There could be no meeting of minds here.'⁶⁹ Eliot found a modern idiom for metaphysical verse drama, whereas Murray held tight to a familiar idiom which was already out of date: 'the high Victorian manner, mellifluously romantic and consciously archaic, was still regarded as the right way to write

poetry.⁷⁰ Hence his paradoxical success. He clothed Euripides' radical, discomfiting plays in conservative, comfortable verse.

Euripides' *Bacchae*, with its blend of radical and conservative elements, seems tailor-made for such an approach. Murray read *Bacchae* as an archetypal drama which re-enacts the Ur-myth (and Ur-ritual) from which Greek tragedy sprang; expresses genuine religious sentiment; and, at the same time, promotes humanism. In translating the play for English readers, he used convenient linguistic and symbolic parallels drawn from another story of sacrifice and renewal: Christianity. But a theological palimpsest like this can only ever be incomplete. Dionysus does not die, let alone rise again. Pentheus' sins are not forgiven. The Kingdom of Heaven was within us all along. Greek religion has become a vehicle for secular wisdom.

Murray's *Bacchae* thus documents an important moment for classical reception, a time before Modernism, when translation norms had not caught up with progressive politics, psychology or philology. Decades, and two world wars, would pass before Eliot revived verse drama and Ezra Pound made Sophocles new. But the practice of blurring pagan theology and Christianity (especially the Eucharist) hung on throughout the twentieth century. Soyinka's *Communion Rite*, which is (as we have seen) heavily indebted to Murray's *Bacchae*, concludes with an African-inflected pseudo-Eucharist. Soyinka writes:

I see *The Bacchae*, finally, as a prodigious, barbaric banquet, an insightful manifestation of the universal need of man to match himself against Nature ... The ritual, sublimated or expressive, is both social therapy and reaffirmation of group solidarity, a hankering back to the origins and formation of guilds and phratries. Man re-affirms his indebtedness to earth, dedicates himself to the demands of continuity and invokes the energies of productivity. Re-absorbed within the communal psyche he provokes the resources of Nature; he is in turn replenished for the cyclic drain in his fragile individual potency.⁷¹

Murray's *Bacchae* translates Greek myth and religion into something else entirely: humanism metaphorized as belief in God and the Kingdom of Heaven. Although *Bacchae* offers other, different allegories, Murray himself was not interested in the phenomena that have so captivated later adaptors, like sex, alcohol, drugs, counter-culture, the irrational, violence and so on.

He preferred gentleness, kindness, goodness et cetera. Even so, by using allegory to make sense of Euripides' hitherto underappreciated masterpiece, he established a pattern which persisted through the long sixties and after. His translation was the opening gambit in, and an enduring model for, the modern reception of *Bacchae*.

Nothing to Do with Modernism?

H.D., 'Choros Translations from *The Bacchae*' (1931)

The previous chapter investigated presences: secular mysteries immanent in the here and now, the Son of Man hiding in plain sight, and Gilbert Murray shadowing *Bacchae* and its reception. This chapter excavates an absence. By rights, Modernists ought to have adored *Bacchae*: a neglected classic, composed by the most radical Greek poet, dramatizing violent cultural upheaval. T. S. Eliot disparaged Murray but still adapted Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus himself. W. B. Yeats and Ezra Pound translated Sophocles twice each.¹ Yet *Bacchae* passed by almost untouched, and translators and adaptors in the long sixties picked up where Murray left off. Modernism never quite got the English *Bacchae* it deserved.²

Not that people forgot the play entirely. Twelve English translations (five of them stand-alone) appeared between 1903 and 1959. A handful of poets used *Bacchae* in lyric miniatures and narrative poems. Eugene O'Neill's play *The Great God Brown* (1926) has plenty to say about Dionysus (see below). And *Bacchae* did catch the attention of one Modernist heavyweight punching in the same division as Yeats, Eliot and Pound: H.D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1886–1961), whose sequence, 'Choros Translations from *The Bacchae*', is the ultimate subject of this chapter.

Modernist writers privileged classical literature. The Modernist master-text, James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), adapts the *Odyssey*. Yeats, without Greek, translated Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (1928) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (1934). Jean Anouilh, a modern (though not Modernist) playwright, wrote an *Antigone* (1944). So did the Modernist Bertolt Brecht (1948). Pound ruffled feathers with *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1919) and, later, Sophocles' *Women of*

Trachis (1956). Eliot, too, adapted Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (*The Family Reunion*, 1939), Euripides' *Alcestis* (*The Cocktail Party*, 1949), Euripides' *Ion* (*The Confidential Clerk*, 1953) and Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* (*The Elder Statesman*, 1958). H.D. herself wrote many classically derived works.

Modernist writers also privileged translation; Pound, Yeats, H.D. and others used translation to recharge their own creative writing. In *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius: A Study in Creative Translation* (1964), J. P. Sullivan observes:

It is in no small measure due to Pound himself that we are today so aware of the value of translation as a poetical [i.e. creative] activity ... In both his criticism and his practice he has stressed translation as one of the threads that link the individual talent to the poetic tradition. And translation in the great literary periods is not necessarily a form of creation inferior to what might be called *original writing* (if such a thing in the conventional sense is possible). The same conditions are necessary for successful translation as for good poetry.³

As Sullivan describes it, creative translation is 'the conversion of a poet in another tongue to the poet's own use'.⁴ Pound's *Homage* is 'a poem which for all its critical limitations we can with some justice recognize as poetry of something near the order of the original. Were it not, it would not be a poem in its own right and thus not *creative* translation either'.⁵ Within accepted limits of textual verisimilitude, a creative translation of foreign-language poetry is both a substitute (however inadequate) for its source text and, at the same time, a new and independent poem in which the translator does not ventriloquize but rather speaks in their own voice. Borrowing from Eliot, Stuart Gillespie describes creative translation as 'translation which (in Eliot's word) "vitalizes" contemporary poetry'.⁶

Creative translation already had a respectable pedigree. But as Steven Yao makes clear in *Translation and the Languages of Modernism* (2002), it was Modernism that properly emancipated creative translation from source texts, source languages and the burden of fidelity:

[A]s the Modernists showed, renewal and discovery requires deep, transformative contact with other cultures and other systems of linguistic representation. And by liberating translation from a metaphysics of originality – that is, by considering the process as one possible mode of generative interaction between languages – we can lay the foundation for a truly cross-cultural poetics.⁷

It is fitting that Yao ends his book with a classical example: Celia and Louis Zukofsky's 1969 'homophonic' translation – often called a 'transliteration' – of Catullus, *Catullus (Gai Valeri Catulli Veronensis Liber)*.⁸ Essentially, 'homophonic' translation treats Latin as not (only) language, but (also) sound; and approaches Catullus' poems not only as semiotic sequences of words, phrases and sentences, but also, predominantly in fact, as strings of phonemes. (The 'homophonic' method still enjoys a solid reputation; David Melnick's 'Men in Aida' is one example.⁹) Some of the Zukofskys' poems (e.g. Catullus 1) make good sense of Catullus' Latin with little transliteration; others, less so; many are nonsense. In the 'Translators' Preface, they assert that:

This translation of Catullus follows the sound, rhythm, and syntax of his Latin – tries, as is said, to breathe the 'literal' meaning with him.¹⁰

The 'transliteration' of Catullus 85, accompanied by a crib and the Latin, will illustrate the method:

I hate and I love. You might wonder why:
I don't know, but I can feel it happening and it's agony.

odi et amo. quare id faciam, fortasse requiris.
nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.

O th'hate I move love. Quarry it fact I am, for that's so re queries.
Nescience, say th' fiery scent I owe whets crookeder.¹¹

Catullus is a fiendish, brilliant book which stretched literary translation to an incredible extent, ultimately approaching the hitherto hypothetical, satirical idea of verbatim translation depicted in Borges' 'Pierre Menard'. Yet Pound had already tried homophony in 'Seafarer' (1912). The *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1919) incorporated linguistic mistakes, intentional or not, into creative translation. The Zukofskys may have been in a bigger ball park, therefore, but they were playing more or less the same game.¹² Despite its suggestive publication date, *Catullus* is a Modernist high-water mark. The Zukofskys were still interested in renovating a literary monument ('making it new', as Pound's famous phrase would have it) rather than defacing or destroying it; Catullus is after all a canonical establishment author, albeit a risqué one. The Zukofskys translated 'the sound, rhythm, and syntax' of Catullus' Latin without completely

divorcing signifiers from signifieds. Printing the English opposite the Latin further cemented the visual, aural and semantic connection between source text and target text. As do many Modernist translations of classical literature, *Catullus* actively engages readers' source-language knowledge.¹³

Catullus also illustrates a seismic shift in translation ethics and translation practice in the English-speaking world, especially in relation to classical antiquity: it was then and is now possible for monolingual writers to 'translate' classical texts in English. Pound's Latin was rusty; Yeats had no Greek; Celia Zukofsky had a little Latin; Louis had none. To the lay reader, of course, translating *Bacchae* without knowing Greek seems a contradiction in terms. But lay readers have scant evidence on which to judge the accuracy of a translation save for their own idea of what translations are supposed to look like. Over time, then, poets writing in English decoupled target texts from source languages. In so doing, they decoupled translation from linguistic proficiency, or whatever impression of linguistic proficiency one gleans from a translation. So Yao:

Completed in the later stages of Louis's career and arising in various ways out of the achievement of their Modernist predecessors, the Zukofskys' infamous *Catullus* (*Gai Valeri Catulli Veronensis Liber*) recasts the practice of translation into a uniquely generative, rather than simply imitative or mimetic, mode of literary production. In doing so, it helped to establish the conditions by which a broad array of contemporary writers including Stephen Mitchell, W. S. Merwin, Robert Hass, Robert Pinsky, Seamus Heaney, and even Ursula LeGuin, among others, come both to translate works in languages of which they have no formal knowledge and to engage in the practice not as a form of training or apprenticeship, but rather as a major avenue of primary cultural expression in its own right and a privilege of established reputation.¹⁴

This is a defining feature of Modernist translation: imitation (*mimesis*) as a means of production (*genesis*). In creative translation, both terms, 'creative' and 'translation', remain in force; later poet-translators mediated the Modernist legacy both through radical methods, like the Zukofskys, and also through more mainstream methods. Robert Lowell describes *Imitations* (1961), a collection of free poem-translations, as 'a small anthology of European poetry'. He also claims that 'poetic translation – I would call it an imitation – must be expert and inspired'.¹⁵ And in *Adaptations* (2006), Derek Mahon (Chapter 5)

unapologetically updates 'imitation' (i.e. the classical tradition) to 'adaptation' (i.e. classical reception):

Nabokov wanted translations to read like translations out of respect for the originals; but the imaginative, recreative (and recreational) adaptation, making the original read like a poem in English, is an equally venerable tradition: poets use it to keep the engine ticking over. Impertinence or poetic licence, the mode has been around too long to need excuses.¹⁶

The epitome of Modernist classical translation in the period proper was Ezra Pound's *Women of Trachis* (1954). As Jankowski observes, history holds a special place for Pound's Sophocles:

When it appeared [in 1954], the translation of the *Women of Trachis* caused a stir among the classical scholars of the English-speaking world, not only because it is a departure from the recognized academic standard, but because Ezra Pound has made another drastic attempt to awaken in people's minds an interest in ancient classics at a time when that interest has all but disappeared. The poets and scholars who have translated Greek drama into English in the course of the last hundred years have almost all remained rigidly faithful to a poetic pattern which has undergone little change for a very long time.¹⁷

Pound was an accomplished poet. He had already proven himself an accomplished translator. And his *Women of Trachis* makes serious, substantive claims about Greek drama and about translation. It is also great fun.

A note explains the odd choice of source text:

The *Trachiniae* presents the highest peak of Greek sensibility registered in any of the plays that have come down to us, and is, at the same time, nearest the original form of the God-Dance.

A version for KITASONO KATUE, hoping he will use it on my dear old friend Miscio Ito, or take it to the Minoru if they can be persuaded to add to their repertoire.

23¹⁸

Women of Trachis is not usually considered one of Sophocles' better tragedies, but Pound ranks it above all other Greek plays. He sees it reflecting tragedy's origins in ritual. He sees similarities between Greek tragedy and Japanese theatre. And he presupposes a consummate ritual drama speaking in

the universal language of the human condition. All of which, as it happens, is not far off Murray's view of *Bacchae*.

The dramatis personae promise a Modernist translation:

The Day's Air, DAIANEIRA, daughter of Oineus.

HERAKLES ZEUSON, the Solar vitality.

AKHELÖOS, a river, symbol of the power of damp and darkness, triform as water, cloud and rain.

HYLLOS, son of Herakles and Daysair.

LIKHAS, a herald.

...

IOLE, Tomorrow, daughter of Eurytus, a King.

24

Pound invents parts for Achelöus and Iole and removes the Old Man character. He transliterates some characters' names from Greek. To others he gives significant nicknames. It is a *prima facie* possibility, for instance, that 'Iole' (Ιόλη, *Iolē*) is related to 'violet' (ἴος, *ios*). Violet is a colour of sunrise. Hence 'Tomorrow'. Herakles' silly surname, 'Zeuson', is perfectly accurate. But 'DAYSAIR', which resonates with 'Tomorrow', has no basis in etymology. *Deianeira* (Δηάνειρα) means 'husband-killer'.

Speech is demotic and colloquial:

DAYSAIR: 'No man knows his luck 'til he's dead.'

They've been saying that for a long time

but it's not true in my case. Mine's soggy.

Don't have to go to hell to find that out.

25

The solo and choral songs, by contrast, rise to greater heights of lyricism and register, and to greater extremes of weirdness:

KHOROS: APOLLO

and Artemis, analolu

Artemis,

Analolu,

Sun-bright Apollo, Saviour Apollo

analolu,

Artemis,

Sylvan Artemis,

Swift-arrowed Artemis, analolu
 By the hearth-stone
 brides to be
 Shout in male company:

APOLLO EUPHARETRON.¹⁹

31

Pound is above all a 'visible' translator. Methods on display in this excerpt alone include transliteration ('analolu', 'EUPHARETRON'), noun-epithet compounds ('Sun-bright Apollo' and so on), free verse, repetition and unconventional typography. Throughout *Women of Trachis*, he mixes formal and demotic, archaizing and modernizing, and foreignizing and domesticating elements to grasp the 'Greek sensibility' and recreate the 'God-Dance'.

And for an iconoclast like Pound, authenticity means getting *Women of Trachis* right where others had got it wrong. Late in Sophocles' play, Heracles comes to understand an old prophecy. First, a literal translation:

It said that I would be released from my current labours, at a time which is now present and alive. I thought it meant things would go well for me. But all it meant was that I would die: there is no labour for the dead. So, then, son, since those words are clearly (*lampra*) coming true (*sumbainei*), I need you to stand by me

Soph. *Trach.* 1169–75

Now Pound:

I am released from trouble.
 I thought it meant life in comfort.
 It doesn't. It means that I die.
 For amid the dead there is no work in service.
 Come at it that way, my boy, what

SPLENDOUR,

IT ALL COHERES.

66

This last phrase is not entirely divorced from the Greek: *lampra* (clear, clearly) begets 'splendour'; *sumbainei* (comes true, fits), 'coheres'. But the giddy typography draws the eye and our attention; this is a self-consciously new way of reading the Sophoclean phrase. A footnote clinches the matter:

This is the key phrase for which the play exists, as in the *Electra* ... At least one sensitive hellenist who has shown great care for Sophocles' works has failed to grasp the main form of the play, either here or in the first chorus, and how snugly each segment of the work fits into its box.

66-7

Those capital letters have a point after all: everyone must suffer, but everything eventually 'coheres'. Whatever one thinks of this interpretation, it should at least be clear that Modernist translation of Greek tragedy cohered, with great splendour, in Pound's *Women of Trachis*.²⁰ No English *Bacchae* comes close.

Nevertheless, *Bacchae* did manage to attract modern poets. So did Dionysus. In *Dionysus and the City: Modernism in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (1970), Monroe Spears even goes so far as to argue that Dionysus is *the* god of Modernism: 'If any god personifies modernism, it is Dionysus.'²¹ Spears first defines Modernist poetry in terms of a self-conscious break with tradition, then describes it using two symbols: 'Dionysus' and 'the City'. 'Dionysus' embodies key ingredients of Modernism. 'The City' – physical and imagined – is where it all happens. Ultimately, these two symbols do not add up to a useful definition.²² But Spears's near-contemporary retrospective of Modernism is still a useful reminder that Dionysus did appear, in person, in English poetry of the period.²³ He stars in Edward Arlington Robinson's non-Modernist dramatic dialogue 'Demos and Dionysus' (1925), for example. He appears repeatedly in Pound's oeuvre. In poem III of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, 'Christ follows Dionysus, / Phallic and ambrosial'. The second Canto tells the story of Dionysus and the pirates.²⁴ Indeed, Pound himself knew Dodds's *Bacchae* commentary and especially liked the idea that Dionysus is a god of liquid vitality.²⁵ According to Spears, 'It would not be much of an exaggeration to say that Dionysus is [Ezra Pound's] god.'²⁶ Even so, his is not the god of Euripides' *Bacchae*.

Nor is Nietzsche's. Nietzsche was the proto-modern philosopher *par excellence*; he invented the modern Dionysus.²⁷ *The Birth of Tragedy* does draw on *Bacchae* (e.g. §§ 1, 2 and 12), and Nietzsche's understanding of Greek ideas about Dionysus is not entirely misguided.²⁸ And yet: 'What Nietzsche has done is take the Greek Apollo and Dionysus, extend their significance, raise it onto a symbolic plane, and then use his symbols as quasi-historical verities like the "real" Greek gods themselves.'²⁹ In turn, modern adaptations of *Bacchae* typically give off at least a faint whiff of *The Birth of Tragedy*.

These three influences – Nietzsche, Dionysus and Modernism – converge in one strange play from the Modernist heyday: *The Great God Brown* (1926), by the pioneer of modern American drama, Eugene O'Neill. *The Great God Brown* illustrates three features of O'Neill's middle period from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s: expressionism and other non-realistic strategies, masks (*Lazarus Laughed*, 1925) and Greek myth (*Desire under the Elms*, 1924; *Mourning Becomes Electra*, 1931). Each protagonist has a mask which he or she can wear or remove; the mask's public face conceals the private self underneath.

Like *Desire under the Elms*, *The Great God Brown* is a tragedy about a love triangle. Billy Brown loves Margaret; Margaret marries Dion Anthony; Dion dies; Billy tries to take Dion's place; Billy dies. It is also a dramatization, using masks, of Apolline and Dionysiac forces fighting over one man's soul. Billy, a straight-laced paragon of society, embodies the Apolline principle. Dion, a 'violent sensualist' who is 'artistic and temperamental' and 'wild', embodies the Dionysiac.³⁰ Billy is a successful but uninspired architect; Dion works for him; he needs Dion's creativity to perfect his own designs. When Dion dies, Billy takes his mask and begins a doomed double life as Dion/Billy. Dion/Billy seems to Margaret 'a new man' and 'quite human'.³¹ But he cannot solve the problem of Apollo and Dionysus.

Explicit references to Cybele, Pan, Silenus and Bacchus bring the play's mythic substrate to the fore.³² The masks recall Greek tragedy. And, as O'Neill explained in an open letter, Dion is a latter-day Dionysus in the Nietzschean mould:

Dion Anthony – Dionysus and St. Anthony – the creative pagan acceptance of life, fighting eternal war with the masochistic, life-denying spirit of Christianity as represented by St. Anthony – the whole struggle resulting in this modern day in mutual exhaustion – creative joy in life for life's sake frustrated, rendered abortive, distorted by morality from Pan into Satan, into a Mephistopheles mocking himself in order to feel alive; Christianity, once heroic in martyrs for its intense faith now pleading weakly for intense belief in anything, even Godhead itself.³³

O'Neill read, admired and responded to Nietzsche's work, especially *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.³⁴ He knew *The Birth of Tragedy* well and had almost certainly read it before writing *The Great God Brown*.³⁵ He even included two substantial quotes from it in the 1926 playbill.³⁶

Guided by Nietzsche, O'Neill explores a number of Dionysian phenomena.³⁷ There are theatrical masks, split personalities, mythical allusions, and Dion and Billy themselves; *The Great God Brown* is a heady gumbo of myth, philosophy and psychology. In a preface to the play, O'Neill wrote: '[The theatre] should return to the spirit of its Greek grandeur. And if we have no gods, or heroes to portray we have the subconscious, the mother of all Gods and heroes.'³⁸ As such, *The Great God Brown* is a Modernist play on a Dionysian theme. (*Lazarus Laughed*, O'Neill's next play, is another.) It is not an adaptation, much less a translation, of *Bacchae*. For that, we must look to the poet, novelist and memoirist, H.D.

H.D. is the pre-eminent female Modernist poet. As the only Modernist writer to publish any of *Bacchae* in English and almost certainly the only woman to do so at all before Anne Carson (see Appendix), she is doubly unique in the play's reception history. Euripides was a major inspiration: H.D. translated choruses from *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Hippolytus* and *Hecuba*; translated *Ion* (1937); wrote the play *Hippolytus Temporizes* (1927); and wrote the epic *Helen in Egypt* (1961). Most importantly, her 1931 collection *Red Roses for Bronze* includes a sequence titled 'Choros Translations from *The Bacchae*'.³⁹

H.D. read (some) Greek. In reply to a letter asking about the influence of translations on her early classical poems, she wrote, late in life: 'Yes, I read a very little Greek and what possible translations there were – Gilbert Murray's prose rather than his poetry.'⁴⁰ Eileen Gregory observes:

She never had, and never aspired to, any but an amateur knowledge of these languages [Greek and Latin]. A study of the extant books of her library housed at Yale indicates that she apparently translated with no little effort, using standard German editions (with Latin translations, notes, and commentary), with the consistent help of dictionaries and with the mediation of French and English translations ... That H.D. considered herself an amateur is not to say, however, that she did not have considerable knowledge of primary and secondary sources.⁴¹

Like H.D.'s other translations, the *Bacchae* choruses were based on an intermediary text, in this case a French translation.⁴² Unlike most of her classical poetry, however, the *Bacchae* choruses fall flat. (The essay on *Bacchae* is also the least coherent of her essays on Greek tragedy.⁴³) Even a doyenne of Modernism, poetry and translation could be thrown off balance by *Bacchae*.

In English poetry, Modernism first appeared as Imagism, a movement started by Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington and H.D. herself. In a 1913 essay 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste', Pound establishes three axioms:

1. Direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome.⁴⁴

In 'Choros Translations from *The Bacchae*', H.D. likewise renders a line of Greek as a kind of metapoetic, Imagist mission statement: 'I cry with every note / of concentrated speech / my song to Dionysos' (223).⁴⁵ The chorus-members' song is to be not just poetry, but *song*. Their 'speech' is to be 'concentrated'. And they are to apply these principles to 'every note'.

These are the criteria by which H.D. composed and translated poetry, and her best poems are marked by taut phrasing and strict pruning. Indeed, 'concentrated speech' can be heard in her debut poem 'Hermes of the Ways', the first in a sequence which Ezra Pound signed off 'H.D., "Imagiste"' and one of H.D.'s many poems on classical themes:

The hard sand breaks,
and the grains of it
are clear as wine.
...
Hermes, Hermes,
the great sea foamed,
gnashed its teeth about me;
but you have waited,
where sea-grass tangles with
shore-grass.⁴⁶

37, 39

In the 1913 Imagism essay, Pound also insisted: "Translation is likewise good training, if you find that your original matter "wobbles" when you try to rewrite it. The meaning of the poem to be translated can not "wobble."⁴⁷ Robert Duncan, discussing H.D.'s choruses from *Iphigenia in Aulis* (1915–16), observes that she 'found her meter, drew her characteristic taut intense line from her translations.'⁴⁸ Quite so: the *Iphigenia* sequence contains some of H.D.'s steadiest

verse.⁴⁹ Of course, *Iphigenia in Aulis* has in modern times languished in the shadow of *Bacchae*, one of the plays alongside which it was originally performed in the late fifth century. In particular, whereas the chorus of maenads in *Bacchae* is generally considered to be one of the most effective choruses in Euripidean tragedy, the chorus of Greek tourists in *IA* is liable to a charge of irrelevance, pointlessness or worse. The escapist themes, observational tenor and lack of any obvious organizing principle make the choral songs sound not unlike the ‘interludes’ (*embolima*) that Aristotle criticizes in the *Poetics*. In H.D.’s hands, however, local colour and keenly observed detail are ends, not means, and those very features go some way towards making the *Iphigenia* choruses amenable to Imagism. She chose her early translations, in particular the choruses from Euripides, carefully: ‘In presenting these lyric sequences [from *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Hippolytus*], H.D. establishes the dimension of the play that most concerns her: an affective intensity, rendered in visual images and mythic allusion, which in a subliminal way figures the action of the drama.’⁵⁰

The first *Iphigenia* poem, ‘Chorus of the Women of Chalkis’, launches with a flourish:

I crossed sand-hills.
I stand among the sea-drift before Aulis.
I crossed Euripos’ strait –
Foam hissed after my boat.

I left Chalkis,
My city and the rock-ledges.
Arethusa twists among the boulders,
Increases – cuts into the surf.

71

This is Imagist verse, and creative translation, of impressive technical accomplishment. The engaging narratorial persona, the waves of rhythm breaking over a bed of free verse, the insistent sibilance, the evocative yet fine-grained compounds (‘sand-hills’, ‘sea-drift’, ‘rock-ledges’), and the sensory immediacy of the stanza-ending lines combine to good effect. There is a crystalline quality to H.D.’s verse, and one hears why Eliot, in the same 1921 essay damning Murray’s Euripides, wrote: ‘the choruses from Euripides by H.D. are, allowing for errors and even occasional omissions of difficult passages, much nearer to both Greek and English than Mr. Murray’s.’⁵¹

H.D.'s choruses from *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae* were all composed between the mid-1910s and 1920.⁵² Yet as the following example will demonstrate, the *Bacchae* sequence is hardly 'concentrated'. Euripides composed the parodos as a hymn to Dionysus in ionics, a metre which was associated with Dionysian music. The *Bacchae* demand silence, tell bystanders to prepare for a sacred procession, sing about the blessings which come from being in a *thiasos*, and welcome Dionysus. In Greek, their song is a convincing expression of genuine devotion to a specific deity. Compare H.D.'s first 'Choros Translation':

Who is there,
 who is there in the road?
 who is there,
 who is there in the street?
 back,
 back, each to his own house ...

223

Dissolute, halting syntax undermines the urgency of what the chorus is saying. Mantric repetitions (which only occasionally correspond to source-text repetitions) further dilute the verse. (Gertrude Stein's work illustrates how closely Modernist repetition skates to self-parody.) H.D.'s chorus loses its poetic momentum in anaphora and ultimately sounds like someone answering a knock at the door: 'Who is there, who is there in the road? Who is there, who is there in the street?' This is odd. H.D. earned her reputation with terse, clipped lines and concrete images. She also disdained repetition in translation, claiming that 'the repetition of useless ornamental adjectives [in Homer] is a heavy strain on a translator's ingenuity.'⁵³

Alice Oswald's *Memorial* (2011) offers a pointed comparison, demonstrating how similar strategies can be deployed to different ends. *Memorial* is a partial translation of the *Iliad* which collates and alternates two quite distinct recurring elements of the Homeric war epic, namely short biographies of dead warriors and epic similes. Oswald calls it 'a bipolar poem'.⁵⁴ One particularly striking feature is the immediate repetition of (almost) every simile, verbatim, as it appears; Oswald translates the similes themselves as pastoral miniatures.⁵⁵ By forcing immediate, complete rereadings of these miniatures, Oswald opens them up to interpretation, reinterpretation and intratextuality. She presents

them as discrete verbal artefacts – as products of ‘concentrated speech’ amenable to Imagism, say. In *Memorial*, as in H.D.’s best translations, the poet selects, compresses and concentrates Greek material.

In contrast, H.D.’s *Bacchae* poems wander off into distant mystical realms. Later in the parodos, Euripides’ *Bacchae* assert that a fortunate (*eudaimōn*), pure and pious man who participates in Dionysiac rituals is happy (*makar*). H.D.’s *Bacchae* describe an all-purpose determinism in which good fortune (*eudaimonia*) is ‘predestined fate’.

O happy, happy each
man whom predestined fate
leads to the holy rite
of hill and mountain worship;
O blessed, blessed spirit
who seeks the mountain goddess

223

Likewise, ‘blessed spirit’ sounds a strangely Victorian note. And when the chorus sings of eating raw goat meat later in the parodos, one still detects a certain otherworldly fastidiousness. Euripides’ *Bacchae* sing of Dionysus ‘hunting the blood of a slain goat, the pleasure of eating raw flesh’ (*Bacch.* 138–9). H.D. translates: ‘to taste the sacred raw flesh / of mystic sacred goat meat’ (225). Overall, her *Bacchae* sequence puts ritualism and repetition (‘sacred’, ‘mystic’, ‘sacred’) ahead of Imagist concentration, precision and sensory detail.

Such preoccupations are clearest in the epode (coda) to the third choral song. In Euripides’ Greek one reads a brief, straightforward *makarismos*: one is happy (*makar*) if one’s life is prosperous (*eudaimōn*) every day (*Bacch.* 910–11). Though some men might win temporary wealth (*olbos*), true happiness only comes when one’s everyday life is favoured by the gods. H.D. translates expansively, with a strong dose of mysticism:

but happier, happier far
I count
mysterious,
mystical happiness

this one
who finds
day by day,

hour by hour,
 mysterious,
 mystical,
 not to be spoken
 bliss.

229

H.D. generalizes: *eudaimonia* (good fortune) is no longer even 'predestined fate' but rather a nebulous 'bliss' which somehow brings happiness. The problem is that such happiness is not only 'mysterious' but also 'mystical', while the bliss is literally ineffable ('not to be spoken'). H.D. ultimately swaps ancient Greek piety for vague, incantatory, secular mysticism.

Certain passages hint at what might have been, had H.D. consistently applied Imagist poetics to *Bacchae*. For example:

to dance in sacred faun-pelt,
 to dance until one falls faint,
 to beat the sacred dance-beat

225⁵⁶

The metre is irregular but consistent: two iambs followed by a bacchius (*da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM-DUM*). There is repetition and variation. Each line has a similar, but not identical, pattern of assonance and alliteration. To be fair, 'sacred' is a flavourless epithet. (How does a 'sacred dance-beat' differ from a profane one?) But still: the verbs are active, the nouns concrete; it is a brief moment of concentrated speech. Another such instance elsewhere in the *Bacchae* sequence results directly from verbal repetition:

O which of the gifts of the gods
 is the best gift?
 this,
 this,
 this,
 this;
 escape
 from the power of the hunting pack

227

For the most part, however, the 'Choros Translations from *Bacchae*' are more concerned with mystical ideas than with language, music or Imagism. In a

metapoetic sense, *Bacchae* might seem well suited to loose free-verse translation; the metaphor of 'freedom' is a likely candidate for the poetry of translation. Dionysus, nicknamed 'Deliverer' by the Greeks and the Romans, is much concerned with literal and figurative freedoms; Euripides' chorus begins the play in captivity. But the *Bacchae* choruses lose much of their effect when freed from their dramatic context. One also has to look very hard indeed for the kinds of concrete image which will sustain Imagist translation. This lack, not to mention the religiosity, musicality and esoteric bent of the Euripidean source text, would seem to have inspired in H.D. an uncharacteristic, prosaic vagueness.

The translations and interpretations of Murray and his ilk can be described with the metaphor of 'fondling' (Introduction). The metaphor applies equally here, for H.D. 'fondles' *Bacchae* lovingly, at arm's length. But in Euripides' text, the Dionysiac also encompasses sacrifice, conflict, violence and *sparagmos*. 'What a beautiful thing it is to drench your hand in a child's blood' (*Bacch.* 1163–4). Even Murray allows secular mysticism to have practical applications. H.D.'s *Bacchae* poems, however, ultimately do what, according to Richard Seaford, modern productions usually do: they convey 'the idea of a mere *atmosphere* of mystery, mystery without content'.⁵⁷

In a way, Modernism was already out of step with Dionysus and with *Bacchae*. Dionysus is an old god and a new one, worshipped at hillside rituals and in civic festivals, superficially foreign yet fundamentally Greek. *Bacchae*, which stars this old–new god, is an old–new tragedy combining modern and traditional ideas and techniques with traditional ones. More than anything, Modernism sought novelty.⁵⁸ (Hence Spears's insistence, in *Dionysus and the City*, that Dionysus is an iconoclast's iconoclast.) And in that respect, H.D.'s 'Chorus Translations from *The Bacchae*' illustrate an important feature of the play's modern reception. *Bacchae* is the classic literary depiction of the god Dionysus. At the same time, 'Dionysus' has become a pervasive, flexible symbol which always potentially obscures the god of Euripides' play. For her part, H.D. seems to have approached the *Bacchae* choruses less as individual musical compositions for and about the Greek god Dionysus, much less Imagist artefacts, and more as a sequence of generic poems about a non-specific, vaguely Dionysian mysticism. Despite the play's prominence in the long sixties and afterwards, it would be another six decades before a poet, Modernist or not, came close to making *Bacchae* new.

Dionysus in Ireland

Derek Mahon, *The Bacchae: after Euripides* (1991)

Derek Mahon is one of Northern Ireland's major literary figures: a prolific, proven poet with a knack for creative translation.¹ And from its opening couplet, *The Bacchae: after Euripides* (1991) begins with a *whoosh*:

DIONYSUS

My name is Dionysus, son of Zeus
and Semele, Cadmus' eldest daughter. Whoosh!
I was delivered by a lightning-flash
and here I am back home in Thebes again
pretending to be a mortal among men
although, as we all know, I am one of the gods.
Over there, in the corner, a monument records
my mother's death by lightning. She lived here
till — pow! — the place was blown to bits by Hera,
the jealous bitch ...

11

Comic-book onomatopoeia ('Whoosh!', 'pow!'), a metatheatrical aside ('as we all know'), a colloquial cliché ('blown to bits'), and, finally, a well-placed expletive ('jealous bitch'): this is no run-of-the-mill translation. Fellow *Bacchae* translator and Irish playwright Colin Teevan (Chapter 6) praises its 'joyous comic bounce'; another critic, its 'blatant iconoclasm'.²

Nor is this a run-of-the-mill Dionysus:

*Before the palace at Thebes; morning. A perpetual flame on Semele's tomb
downstage. Empty wine-skins scattered about. Lights up on DIONYSUS, a gaily
dressed young man, his hair long and curly, a thyrsus in one hand. He wears a*

fawnskin and sandals, moves blithely, and speaks in a light, gay voice. The fawnskin is a decorative scarf, the thyrsus a fennel wand wreathed with ivy.

11

Like many since, this Dionysus is camp, effeminate and gay: he moves ‘blithely’; his voice is ‘light’ and ‘gay’; he is dressed ‘gaily’ with a ‘decorative scarf’. Judging by the wine-skins, he appears to have been drinking. From Dionysus’ entrance and first words, Mahon signals a new kind of *Bacchae* translation: domesticating, modernizing and ‘visible’.

Hugh Haughton describes Mahon’s *Bacchae* as ‘dissonantly tragi-comic’.³ And indeed, tragicomic dissonance is threaded right through Mahon’s oeuvre. From ‘Glengormley’ and ‘Spring in Belfast’ to more recent poems, sympathy, wit and stubborn insouciance make for a lively, humane voice. Moreover, tragicomic dissonance can be heard so clearly in this *Bacchae* because it had been effectively absent from the play’s translation history beforehand. In light of Nicole Loraux’s view that Greek tragedy can be ‘anti-political’, then I read Mahon’s *Bacchae* as an anti-political, parodic translation.⁴

Born into a Protestant family and educated at Trinity College Dublin with Michael Longley, Derek Mahon has been associated with the famous ‘Belfast Group’, especially Seamus Heaney. But he has vehemently denied being in ‘Philip Hobsbaum’s fucking Belfast group’; he has also described himself as a ‘lapsed’ Protestant.⁵ He eschews dogma. He once described one of his poems (‘The Snow Party’) as a ‘Comment or No Comment on the Troubles’.⁶ As he said in 2006:

Marching for civil rights was terrific, but bombs and killing people? I never put a name to my own position and I still can’t, which suits me fine ... [T]here is all this ambiguity. That is poetry. It is the other thing that is the other thing.⁷

His poems, too, project religious and political agnosticism. All in all, Mahon’s poetic persona is something of a secular mystic.⁸

Alongside related intertextual practices like adaptation, *ecphrasis* and so on, translation is a major feature of Mahon’s work.⁹ Across individual poems; volumes; plays; the collections *Adaptations* (2006), *Raw Materials* (2011) and *Echo’s Grove* (2013); and in various *Selected* and *Collected Poems*, he has proven himself a first-rate adaptor and translator. Rui Carvalho Homem observes:

‘Mahon’s writerly stance is thus defined by a relational awareness of making sense and enabling signification by writing himself against other texts.’¹⁰ His early adaptations from Molière aimed to have good, solid fun with classic theatre, and so, too, did his *Bacchae*.¹¹ Broadly speaking, these are fluent, domesticating, modernizing versions. But people expect different things from Molière and Euripides. In particular, radically domesticating *Bacchae* can, paradoxically, foreignize it:

Euripides’s text is brought over to Mahon’s contemporary reader in such a radically current language that it becomes highly ‘foreignised’, in relation to most readers’ expectations of what a Classical text ‘should’ sound like.¹²

In this respect, *The Bacchae: after Euripides* is a polemical translation. It is also a humorous one. And parody, as Simon Dentith defines it, ‘includes any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice’.¹³ If we take parody to be polemical, humorous imitation of cultural artefacts or practices, therefore, then reading Mahon’s *Bacchae* as a parodic text makes good sense. Mahon’s aims were, literally, to ‘knock [Seamus Heaney’s] *The Cure at Troy* into a cocked hat’ and to ‘put the fun back into Greek tragedy’.¹⁴ In practice, this fun is mostly had at the expense of three targets: (1) Euripides’ *Bacchae*; (2) Irishness; (3) political receptions of the classics.¹⁵

As Mahon’s first major classical work, *The Bacchae: after Euripides* stands out in his oeuvre and also among other Irish–Greek tragedies. He wrote it in 1990 during a month-long fellowship at the Yaddo artists’ colony in Saratoga Springs, New York.¹⁶ It was originally commissioned for the Dublin Theatre Festival, but the production ‘fell victim to administrative changes’; in 1993 Mahon’s editor was still ‘continuing to pitch *The Bacchae* to anyone he thought might take an interest in producing the play’.¹⁷ Nevertheless, *Bacchae* took its place in the Mahon canon. There was an RTÉ (Raidió Teilifís Éireann) radio play. There were stage productions in 2002, 2012 and 2014.¹⁸ The text is collected in *Theatre* (2013), and Mahon once planned to include choruses from it in *The Hudson Letter* (1995).¹⁹

During the same fellowship, he also wrote *The Yaddo Letter* (1992): a welcome return to stand-alone poetry but also a controversial foray into long-form, confessional verse. Mahon’s earlier poems are characterized by formal

control, objective distance and ‘well-cut stanzas.’²⁰ *The Yaddo Letter* is a discursive, informal, at times embarrassingly intimate letter to the speaker’s teenaged children, composed in loose heroic couplets. It is also an illuminating counterpart to Mahon’s *Bacchae*. Towards the end comes a climactic passage:

Children of light, may your researches be
 reflections on this old anomaly;
 may you remember, as the years go by
 and you grow slowly towards maturity,
 that life consists in the receipt of life,
 its fun and games, its boredom and its grief;
 that no one, sons or daughters, fathers, wives,
 escapes the rough stuff that makes up our lives.²¹

The poet outlines a secular-humanist mystery which explains life itself without metaphysics: ‘life consists in the receipt of life’. Life has its ups and downs (‘fun and games’, ‘rough stuff’). He continues:

Equip yourselves in every way you can
 to take it like a woman or a man,
 respecting values you’ve long understood
 pertaining to the true, the beautiful and the good.
 Sorry to sound so tedious and trite.
 I’d hoped to be more fun and try to write
 you something entertaining as I often try to do;
 but this time round I wanted to be *seerious* and true
 to felt experience. My love 2U.
 Nothing I say you don’t already know.²²

Trite or not, he speaks forthrightly of moral absolutes (‘values you’ve long understood’) which are esoteric and conservative: ‘the true, the beautiful and the good’. These ‘values’ are universal (‘no one ... escapes’) and widely accepted. They are traditional (‘old’). They offer life lessons (‘researches’, ‘remember’, ‘as the years go by’, ‘equip yourselves’) and mystery (‘this old anomaly’). He addresses his children as initiates (‘Children of light’). Overall, it is a generous, tragicomic account of the human condition.

Composed at the same time and in the same place, *The Bacchae: after Euripides* talks about similar things in a similar way. Nowhere is this clearer than in the ‘What is wisdom?’ choral song. Mahon divides *Bacchae* into two

acts; the second opens with this song. He also repeats half of it, including the refrain (which now appears four times verbatim), at the end of the play *after* Euripides' coda. At important structural junctures, these lines take on programmatic significance as a reflection on *Bacchae*, Dionysus and the meaning of life.

So, at the close of Mahon's *Bacchae*:

Gods come in various shapes
and act in curious ways;
neither our fears nor hopes
work out as we suppose.
Life is unfair, no doubt,
and yet the gods demand
our homage, which is what
we've tried to demonstrate.

...

Truth as old as the hills,
derived from very nature,
rules the world and rules
the life of every creature.

What pleases best, what grand
gift can the gods bestow
more than the conquering hand
over the fallen foe?
It's still the same old story,
a fight for love and glory,
and every heart admits that this is so!

*Music and dance; thunder and lightning; triumphant reappearance of
DIONYSUS, his arms folded authoritatively.*

61–2

Here ends the lesson and the play: 'It's still the same old story, / a fight for love and glory, and every heart admits that this is so!' In Greek: 'Whatever is beautiful is always precious' (*Bacch.* 881). 'Beauty is precious' was already proverbial in Athens (Pl. *Lysis* 216c). From this Greek proverb, Mahon derives a new English one: life is a struggle for love and glory. This new proverb itself

recycles a popular song lyric courtesy of Hollywood and Broadway: the phrase 'It's still the same old story, a fight for love and glory' comes from the song 'As Time Goes By', made famous in *Casablanca*.²³ Mahon's *Bacchae* thus ends in the sentimental mood of *The Yaddo Letter*. The chorus invokes universal tradition ('same old story'; 'every heart admits that this is so') and offers life lessons ('the life of every creature'). It reflects on 'truth', 'love and glory', and 'life' – which is of course 'unfair'. And in a wider sense, Mahon's *Bacchae* presents a generous, tragicomic account of the human condition and the 'fight for love and glory'.

A further likeness between *The Yaddo Letter* and the *Bacchae* translation is stitched in the fabric of the verse. *The Yaddo Letter* is composed in loose heroic couplets. So is much of Mahon's *Bacchae*. In this as in other respects, then, Mahon translates *Bacchae* more or less as he translates comedy. Some have criticized the informal looseness of his later couplets; others see him consciously manipulating the form to reinvent poetic tradition.²⁴ Either way, *The Yaddo Letter* and the *Bacchae* translation reveal a major development in Mahon's poetics. *The Yaddo Letter* 'carried forward something of the conversational ease and brio of his Molière adaptations ... and laid the ground for his later style, combining an autobiographical idiom with more open, continuous forms'.²⁵

Despite the poem's relaxed, self-deprecating register, the speaker of *The Yaddo Letter* claims to have stopped being entertaining and started being serious. This is 'seerious' poetry. In everyday language, he rejects highbrow public poetry to celebrate 'the true, the beautiful and the good'. Likewise, as we will see, Mahon's *Bacchae* is light-hearted, parodic and fun, including the 'well-cut stanzas' translating Euripides' choral lyrics. In each work, informality, looseness and humour go hand in hand with deeply felt, big ideas; and poetic play is a means to get at serious matters. *The Bacchae: after Euripides* makes 'seerious fun' a viable way to rewrite Greek tragedy. In doing so, it lays claim to being a poem of translation.

Three epigraphs introduce Mahon's *Bacchae*: one from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, one from Dodds's *The Greeks and the Irrational*, and one from Louis MacNeice's *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (9). In the first epigraph, Nietzsche describes Dionysiac and Apolline forces creating beauty together. In the second, Dodds insists that maenads are 'an observed and still observable human type'.

In the third, MacNeice compares Yeats' enjoyment of an 'efflorescence in old age' to Euripides' realization, in his old age, that 'there was a case for Dionysus'. (The uncannily similar epigraphs in Donna Tartt's Dionysiac potboiler *The Secret History* outline a quite different argument.²⁶) The message is clear: 'Dionysus' is real and dangerous; he needs 'Apollo'; poets should accept him. Across these three epigraphs, then, Dionysus embodies a certain kind of poetry – Irish lyric poetry, perhaps – which balances id and superego, technique and inspiration, rationalism and metaphysics. Mahon later called these epigraphs 'pretentious' and cut them from *Theatre* (2013): 'They were meant, in any case, to be illustrative, evidential, not corroborative ... Yeats is preferable: "Gaiety transfiguring all that dread."²⁷

In effect, Mahon's *Bacchae* enters a conversation not only with *The Yaddo Letter*, but also with Yeats: Yeats's poem 'Lapis Lazuli', which Mahon quotes here, takes an equally generous, humanistic view of life, of 'tragedy wrought to its uttermost'.²⁸ Yeats was the Irish lyric poet *par excellence* and one of Mahon's great influences. He himself translated the other late, great, fifth-century tragedy of old age: Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. He even immortalized choral poetry from that play (as Mahon later planned to do with *Bacchae*) in 'A Man Young and Old' (1928), a sequence which concludes with the following beloved lines:

Never to have lived is best, ancient writers say;
 Never to have drawn the breath of life, never to have looked into the eye
 of day;
 The second best's a gay goodnight and quickly turn away.²⁹

Grasping at gaiety amidst dread, saying a gay goodnight: this is not so far from singing an 'old story' about 'love and glory' for a 'gaily dressed' Dionysus with a 'light, gay' voice. Framed by Nietzsche, Dodds and Yeats, Mahon's *Bacchae* is a play about Dionysus, to be sure, but also one about human flourishing (efflorescence) in the face of mortality.

We have so far approached *The Bacchae*: after Euripides via four overlapping principles: *seerious*-ness, tragicomic dissonance, secular mysticism and putting the fun back into tragedy. With those principles in mind, we now turn to Mahon's parodic *Bacchae* and its main targets: Euripides, 'Ulster poets' and po-faced political interpretations of the classics.

Mahon is well suited to parody. Before *Bacchae*, he wrote lively, and funny, verse adaptations of Molière's *The School for Wives* and *The School for Husbands*; later, he translated Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. In his French comedies, heroic couplets host an ongoing poetic game played with metatheatrical, bilingual puns, metrical variation, false rhyme, colloquialism and vulgarity. He adapts and translates comedy 'for the fun of the thing'.³⁰ Consequently, 'putting the fun back' into *Bacchae* entails making it sound like comedy.

In this, Mahon takes a cue from Euripides, for his translation is very much alive to the potential for humour, latent or otherwise, in *Bacchae* and its reception. In the Greek, Pentheus complains: 'Already the insolence (*hubrisma*) of these Bacchantes is blazing like fire, a failure (*psogos*) before all Greeks' (*Bacch.* 778–9). Mahon subtly shifts the emphasis: 'Bacchism, spreading like a forest fire, makes us ridiculous' (35–6). The key word here is 'ridiculous', corresponding to *psogos* ('flaw, failure, criticism'). Dionysus' cult (here given the ponderous title of 'Bacchism') is the object of ridicule; laughter is not just burning but spreading. There is even the faintest hint of a suggestion that what is really spreading is the comic interpretation of *Bacchae*, already firmly established in adaptation but now rapidly consuming other ways of reading the source text. 'In ways that risk repeatedly either bathos or the charge of ineptitude,' writes Christopher Murray, 'Mahon presents *Bacchae* in a language which endorses [Pentheus'] attitude.'³¹

In one exchange, witty stage directions, italics, a triple rhyme and a successive regularization of metre neatly set up Pentheus' monosyllabic final pentameter as a kind of punchline:

DIONYSUS (*mischievously*)

Would you like to see what the Bacchae *do* in the wood?

PENTHEUS (*a thoughtful and embarrassed pause*)

Well, now you mention it, I suppose I should.

I'd give a *lot* to see them if I could.

37

Taplin, writing about Tony Harrison's *Oresteia*, asserts that 'Greek tragedy is musopoeic; and the music is not just decorative, but integral to its very *raison d'être* ... music and dynamic should be at the top of the translator's agenda.'³²

That is: translators of Greek tragedy should use verse; should distinguish between the three major modes of delivery in Greek tragedy, namely speech, chant and song; and should write lyrics which can be set to music and sung. Even setting aside normative claims about what translators should and should not do, this remains a salutary reminder that Greek tragedy was a music-theatre genre and that some translations are more overtly musical (i.e. rhythmic and singable) than others. And despite obvious differences between Mahon's *Bacchae* and Harrison's *Oresteia*, each text is heavily invested in musopoesis. Unlike Harrison's craggy, alliterative verse, however, Mahon uses heroic couplets to bring 'music and dynamic' to *Bacchae*, thereby avoiding that 'poetics of stiltedness' on which Greek drama translation so often relies.³³

It has been claimed that Mahon uses rhyme to 'signal' Dionysus' presence.³⁴ This is not quite true.³⁵ Dionysus himself, for example, curses Pentheus in blank verse (40, 45). Strictly speaking, Dionysus and the chorus-leader mostly use heroic couplets; Cadmus, Agaue and Pentheus mostly use rhyme while Dionysus is onstage and occasionally when he is offstage.³⁶ To be precise: Mahon uses rhyme to *suggest* a Dionysian influence on the characters in the drama. In terms of poetics, Mahon's use of rhyme in *Bacchae* also asserts a subversive, Dionysian attitude to literary tradition. Yeats, Pound and Eliot wrote unrhymed dramatic dialogue. So did Seamus Heaney, whose *The Cure at Troy* (a 1990 'version' of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*) spurred Mahon to translate *Bacchae*. We will return to *The Cure at Troy* later, but suffice it for now to observe that the two plays are antithetical in many ways; and that Mahon, unlike Heaney, hears tragicomic dissonance in rhyme.

According to one critic, Dionysus speaks 'almost flippantly'.³⁷ The qualifier is unnecessary. He notes offhandedly that Hera has 'done in' his own mother (12). Then, after coughing '*apologetically*', this supposedly angry god says, 'I'm afraid I've driven those aunties round the bend'; his aunties 'rant and rave ... rock 'n' roll among the rocks, under the moonlit pines' (12). Aurally and semantically, his alliterative, anachronistic slang sequence (*rant/rave, rock/roll*) suggests sexual, social and pharmacological licence. Later, he teaches Pentheus to shake the *thursos* 'on the beat', saying, 'Don't worry, you'll soon get the hang of it' (44). Bathos reigns: *sparagmos* is 'death by dismemberment' (35); Agaue asks whether Pentheus' body is 'in – one piece?' (56). When Pentheus enquires about the new religion, Dionysus answers, 'That is for me to know, you to find

out' (25). He calls Pentheus 'old son' (27), 'old boy' (32) and 'old sport' (42). Throughout, in fact, he plays court jester, teasing Pentheus as one cousin to another.

Coarse language is almost as conspicuous in Mahon's French comedies as it is in colloquial Irish English. *High Time* (1985) contains two expletives, *The School for Wives* (1986) twelve, and *Cyrano* (2004) thirteen, not including scatological words or garden-variety insults like 'twit', 'twerp', 'sod', 'yob' or 'old fart'. Unlike his other tragedies, moreover, Mahon's *Bacchae* also includes swear-words, infrequently but at key moments. Just ten lines into the prologue, Dionysus calls Hera a 'jealous bitch' (11). Pentheus, entering the stage for the first time, '*kicks the empty wine-skins impatiently*' and says, 'Oh, for fuck's sake!' (17). In a less extreme example, Dionysus also says to Pentheus, 'I'm trying to save your *life*, you pompous twit!' (37). This is idiomatic, realistic dialogue; people say such things when they are upset. But 'bitch', 'fuck' and 'twit' are also, in another sense, comedic words which are, to some ears at least, out of place in a translation of Greek tragedy. And in that respect, parodic translation resonates with 'paracomedy': the practice, strongly associated with Euripides, of recycling recognizably comic elements (in this instance, swear-words and colloquial insults) in a tragedy.³⁸

Crucially, Mahon treats neither Sophocles (*Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Oedipus at Colonus*) nor Racine (*Phèdre*) in this fashion. Euripides has long been stereotyped as a demotic tragedian, his language by turns praised and criticized for being down to earth. In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, the character of Euripides says that tragic poets should have their characters speak like real people; Aeschylus retorts that noble themes require noble language (1056–60). But language in Euripidean tragedy is only ever colloquial to a limited extent, only relative to Aeschylean and Sophoclean tragedy, and never crude or stylistically heterogeneous as in Aristophanic comedy.³⁹ By speaking as though they were in a comedy, Mahon's characters make a mockery of *Bacchae* itself.

The second target of Mahon's parody is Irishness. The chorus names Dionysus Lord of the Dance:

Raise your eyes to the hills
 where, clad only in skins, the lord
 of the dance wrestles the goat and kills
 it, eats it raw and drinks its blood.

The phrase 'Lord of the dance' comes from a 1963 Christian folk-hymn of the same name. The tune, featured in Copland's *Appalachian Spring* (1944) and *Old American Songs* (part 1, 1950), certainly sounds as though it could be Irish-derived, and many do assume that 'Lord of the Dance' is in fact an Irish hymn. In James K. Baxter's play *Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party* (1968), the Irish stranger Tom O'Dwyer pays tribute to 'the god of the dance'.⁴⁰ Michael Flatley's Irish dance show *Lord of the Dance* (1996) famously played on the same association. But 'Lord of the Dance' is not an Irish song. The tune is American, from the hymn 'Simple Gifts' (1848) by Joseph Brackett. The words were written by a contemporary English folk composer, Sydney Carter.⁴¹ As Lord of the Dance, therefore, Dionysus is a faux-Irish poseur. Through repetition, however, the phrase 'lord of the dance' becomes as evocative, and as Irish, a title inside Mahon's *Bacchae* as outside it (15, 46–7).

Religion and religiosity are prominent, stereotypical features of Irish identity. Naming Dionysus – not Jesus – the Lord of the Dance suggests a playful attitude to that stereotype. That attitude persists throughout, as for example in light-hearted biblical allusions. In one ode, the chorus sings, 'Oh, for the fun of a fawn' (41), alliteratively parodying the phrase 'O for the wings, for the wings of a dove' from Mendelssohn's anthem 'Hear My Prayer', itself derived from Psalm 55.⁴² In a later invented passage, Dionysus himself asserts, 'Ah, but no god is mocked; our actions show / to men the obedience they must undergo' (59). He knows his Bible: 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap' (Gal. 6.7).⁴³

Alongside biblical allusions, there are various references to narcotics. Tiresias plans to wear 'Bacchic gear' (15), 'gear' being slang for drug paraphernalia. The chorus later wish to go where 'ecstasy isn't banned' (22), 'Ecstasy' being a street name for the illicit drug MDMA.⁴⁴ According to Dionysus, the Theban women 'rant and rave' (12), 'rave' being slang for a dance party featuring illicit drugs, especially Ecstasy.⁴⁵ (Conspicuous by its absence is the all-too-obvious pun '*craic* cocaine'.) Though nominally a religious drama, Mahon's *Bacchae* consistently undermines the solemnity (*semnotēs*: *Bacch.* 486) of both Greek and Irish religion.

This *Bacchae* shares with Mahon's comedies another Irish trait absent from his other tragedies: Hiberno-English idiom. In *High Time*, characters call each other 'eejits', 'devils', 'daft' and 'ould son'; they mention 'brogues', 'ould lip' and the

'glad-eye'. Speakers in Mahon's *Bacchae* also sound more or less Irish. Cadmus says to Tiresias, 'Give me your hand and let's be going, so' (16). Dionysus says to Pentheus, 'Yes, you're her very image, to be sure' (43). In the hands of an Irish poet, this shades into self-parody, collapsing Irish poetics and poetic Irishness into a bundle of linguistic reflexes. 'To be sure' and 'so' are stereotypical Hiberno-English idioms; both occur, for example, in J. M. Synge's canonical Irish play *The Playboy of the Western World*.⁴⁶ Or, in Mahon's poem 'Waterfront': 'The sun / shines on the dump, not on the *côte d'azur* / and not on the cloistered murals, to be sure.'⁴⁷

There is fun to be had with Irish vocabulary. I identify one comparable instance elsewhere in Mahon's plays, from *Cyrano de Bergerac* Act II, scene vii:

Uasal; scéiniúil; spreagúil; álainn; aoibhinn!

Commendious; bontious; grantious; galantine!⁴⁸

Instead of Rostand's Latinate neologisms, which pass smoothly enough from French to English, Mahon couples Irish words with his own neologisms. The joke here is partly on the reader or listener, at least a non-Irish-speaking one, and partly on the Irish language itself, which is treated like a stock of comic nonce-words.

In Mahon's *Bacchae*, likewise, Tiresias looks forward not to a *thiasos* but to a *céilídh*:

Tiresias is here, tell the old fool.

I'm old myself, of course, but he's older still.

We agreed to get ourselves some Bacchic gear

and go to the famous *céilí*, like half the women here.

15

A *céilídh* (or *céilí*) is a secular party involving music, dancing, drinking and good *craic* (conversation). *Thiasos* is to *céilídh* as Holy Communion is to wine and cheese.

A few lines later, Cadmus proves his Irishness through dance. Stage directions instruct him to 'demonstrate with a jig' his 'willingness to dance all night, all day too, given half a chance' (15). Tiresias then 'giggles' and says, 'You're only as young as you feel' (16). The two of them act like ageing hippies getting stoned for old time's sake. Tiresias' drug- or alcohol-addled giggling comes at the expense of Cadmus' wobbly dancing, at the silliness of an Irish jig

in a Greek tragedy, and also at the very idea of a national dance. All in all, religious allusions, Cadmus' jig, Tiresias' giggle, the *céilidh* and Hiberno-English idioms cumulatively parody Irishness itself.

All of which leads to the third potential target for parodic translation: the politicization of Greek tragedy, especially in Ireland, and most especially by Seamus Heaney. Rooted in a Belfast childhood, Mahon's own poetry is recognizably, self-consciously Irish. At the same time, his exile-poet persona looks outward to Europe and the Americas and refuses to be an 'Ulster poet' like Heaney or Longley.⁴⁹ For all their differences, plays such as Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* or Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* (a 1984 'version' of Sophocles' *Antigone*) tend to simplify Greek tragedy and overwrite liberal politics onto it.⁵⁰ *The Bacchae: after Euripides* is an unparochial, anti-political play which insists that being a Northern Irish poet does not have to mean taking sides. Mahon has described politics explicitly in terms of poetry:

[T]he act of writing is itself political in the fullest sense. A good poem is a paradigm of good politics – of people talking to each other, with honest subtlety, at a profound level.⁵¹

His *Bacchae* proves that parodic translation is one way of talking with honest subtlety, at a profound level, to antiquity.

Mahon squares off in particular against Seamus Heaney.⁵² As we have seen, he wanted his *Bacchae* 'to put the fun back into Greek tragedy' but also boasted that it would outdo *The Cure at Troy*. It is a bold claim: *The Cure at Troy* is one of the best-known and most popular of Irish classical plays, and it contains some of Heaney's best-loved verse. For all their apparent flippancy, however, Mahon's *skopoi* signify that *The Cure at Troy* was lacking in, or had somehow ruined, the 'fun' of Greek tragedy. As such, Peter McDonald's binary model of translation as 'cure' versus translation as 'disruption' is particularly useful in thinking about Mahon's and Heaney's respective attitudes to tragedy:

Such risks are inherent in the understanding of translation as 'cure' which Heaney's play [*The Cure at Troy*] – in this sense at least like Paulin's *The Riot Act* – puts into practice, so that the translated text is not only relevant to its present context, but also seeks to minister to that context, to reassure and confirm. As such, Sophocles becomes a vehicle for a distinctly Heaneyesque

drama of decency, faith, and reconciliation in which it is poetry that is the true protagonist.⁵³

If Heaney's Sophocles is curative, Mahon's Euripides is disruptive.

Unlike Heaney's play, *The Bacchae: after Euripides* refuses to prescribe metatheatre (drama about drama) or metapoetics (poetry about poetry) as a cure for anything. Dionysus sets the scene, and the tone, in his prologue. He says, offhandedly, 'although as we all know, I am one of the gods' (11). The aside 'as we all know' stresses the collusion between audience and performer, reader and translator without assuming a collective political will. He continues:

It was out there, in what we call the East,
that I began my Dionysian quest,
evolved my rites and, incidentally,
picked up the Chorus you'll meet presently.
Why did I choose Thebes as the first place
to do my Dionysian stuff in Greece?
I'll tell you.

11

He is supremely self-aware. He knows that he is addressing an audience. He knows that he is the god of 'Dionysian stuff' on a 'Dionysian quest'. And as the god of drama, he knows that by convention a chorus will soon enter. This kind of jokey metatheatre is commonplace in humorous drama, not least Aristophanes' comedies or burlesques like *Pentheus*, and what distinguishes it most clearly from, say, 'serious' or 'tragic' metatheatre is its explicitness and calculated nonchalance.⁵⁴

Heaney uses metapoetics for different purposes. In two substantial, invented, oracular sequences bookending *The Cure at Troy*, the chorus (here if anywhere speaking for the poet) insists that poetry and politics are connected. More specifically, in the prologue, Heaney's chorus assumes a mediating role shared by poetry (which is, according to McDonald, 'the true protagonist'):

I hate it [dogmatism], I always hated it, and I am a part of it myself.

And a part of you,
For my part is the chorus, and the chorus
Is more or less a borderline between
The you and the me and the it of it.

Between
The gods' and human beings' sense of things.

And that's the borderline that poetry
Operates on too⁵⁵

This is grand stuff. It is also vague and mysterious. (What is *the it of it* exactly?) One hears strains of a priestly, prophetic yet also secular metaphysical voice through which Heaney mediates humanistically between painful history and 'curative' myth.⁵⁶

Mahon, by contrast, '[does not] seek solace in mythopoesis, to move from history to myth or to commute between them, as Seamus Heaney memorably did in *North*, in search of order and redress.'⁵⁷ From a position of exile, Mahon the hermit-poet 'rebukes' the possibility of re-establishing lost ties, instead 'discovering in the imagination an alternative home that transcends what he perceives as the failed filiative bonds.'⁵⁸ Generally speaking, he translates in an emotionally detached manner.⁵⁹ In *Bacchae* specifically, he does not cure the Troubles with poetry or tragedy. Instead of enlisting the tragic chorus as an intercessor or political mediator, Mahon's Dionysus simply explains that *his* chorus is made up of 'women who've followed me from the East and share / my own objectives' (12). The only party that matters here is a *céilidh*.

Not that Mahon's *Bacchae* is naïve. In an interview following the play's publication, he called the conflict between 'the subversive Dionysian spirit' and rationalist ideology 'a form of sectarianism.'⁶⁰ His Dionysus, in turn, introduces a key phrase which the chorus repeatedly picks up: 'Pipe and drum' (13).⁶¹ Beyond the reference to ancient Greek music, 'Pipe and drum' alludes to Protestant marches in Northern Ireland, which are typically accompanied by drums and woodwind instruments; and, by extension, to the violence associated with those marches. When the chorus enjoins the Thebans to 'Let nobody interfere, shut your houses tight' (13), one hears a warning to innocent bystanders. Semele's house was 'blown to bits by Hera' (11); the collocation 'blown to bits' typically refers to munitions, not lightning. Dionysus knows about the Troubles: he asks, rhetorically, whether 'mere roadblocks can contain a god' (32).⁶² In a wider sense, given Mahon's anti-political poetics, Dionysus is also asking whether mere politics can contain Greek tragedy.

The Cure at Troy ends with a famous sequence, collected in 'Voices from Lemnos' and quoted by Bono and Bill Clinton, which needs no repeating here. It is 'the most political of Heaney's poems, the chorus from *The Cure at Troy* about history and hope'.⁶³ Commenting on the Troubles, Heaney's chorus looks forward to a day when *hope* catches up – literally, 'rhyme[s]' – with *history*. The chorus, appealing to Philoctetes and (by implication) to the audience, begins with realism: 'Human beings suffer ... History says, *Don't hope / On this side of the grave*.' It paints in durable primary colours: 'history', 'hope', 'justice', 'sea-change', 'revenge', 'miracles', 'cures', 'healing', 'fortunate', 'believe' and 'trust'. And it concludes the play with a metapoetic cure to accompany Philoctetes' impending physical one: the 'half-true rhyme' is *love*.⁶⁴

Derek Mahon's *Bacchae* ends with a different kind of love: 'It's still the same old story, a fight for love and glory, and every heart admits that this is so!' Unlike the solemn ending of *The Cure at Troy*, Mahon maintains a parodic stance towards Greek tragedy, concluding with an ancient proverb ('Beauty is precious') brought into English via a quote from a sentimental love song immortalized in a sentimental film. The Hollywood allusion strikes an off-key, upbeat note and disrupts straightforward allegory. Not that tragicomic dissonance is banished. 'As Time Goes By' may be a love song, but *Casablanca* is set in wartime. And Dionysus must always, eventually, reappear with thunder and lightning, 'triumphant', 'arms folded authoritatively' (62). So Homem:

However much stress Mahon lays on Euripides's point that it is futile and misguided to deny the Dionysian, he cannot suppress the horror of the death and dismemberment of Pentheus ... This is the point at which the jocular tone of Dionysus's speeches turns sour, together with the whole boisterous element that Mahon whips up throughout the translation.⁶⁵

As we have seen, the fight 'for love and glory' between the 'subversive Dionysian spirit' and the conservative, 'rationalist' ideals embodied by Pentheus and his roadblocks is for Mahon a kind of sectarianism. And sectarianism always ends in bloodshed. For all the 'jocular tone' and anti-political objectivity, his *Bacchae* offers a bleak view.

He did try curative translation eventually in *Oedipus* (2005), 'a version of Sophocles' *King Oedipus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*' dedicated to Seamus Heaney. In a telling omission, this volume includes two of Sophocles' Theban plays but

not *Antigone*, which Heaney himself translated as *The Burial at Thebes* (2004). (Yeats translated both *Oedipus* plays, while Stephen Spender combined all three Theban plays in *The Oedipus Trilogy*). Crucially, the final scene of Mahon's *Oedipus* alludes to and even quotes the ending of *The Cure at Troy*. Ismene insists, 'One thing consoles us this side of the grave / and even beyond it, and that thing is love.' After the chorus's closing words, a final stage direction reads, 'It grows dark; a nightingale sings; cry of a new-born child.'⁶⁶ (In *The Cure at Troy*, the chorus says: 'The outcry and the birth-cry / Of new life at its term.'⁶⁷) In the end, Mahon translates Sophocles in the manner of Heaney and Yeats; his other poems and translations typically eschew redemptive metaphysics and false hope. As the speaker of 'A Garage in Co. Cork' asserts, 'We might be anywhere but are in one place only ... Not in the hope of a resplendent future / But with a sure sense of its intrinsic nature.'⁶⁸ The same is true of Mahon's *Bacchae*; unlike Sophocles, Euripides cannot cure the world's ills with 'hope of a resplendent future'.

Ireland has become something of a poster child for classical reception. In particular, Irish writers are often seen to be reading classics onto the Troubles, with classical reception the supposed ally of interventionist postcolonial theatre; Brien Friel's play *Translations* is perhaps the best-known example. A major collection of essays on the subject is titled, suggestively, *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy*.⁶⁹ And in that vein, Marianne McDonald (co-editor of *Amid Our Troubles* and frequent commentator on Irish classical reception) boldly describes Mahon's *Bacchae* as 'a parable suitable for Ireland'.⁷⁰ Strictly speaking, *The Bacchae: after Euripides* is not a parable. It is a parodic translation. In any case, using humour to resist political and literary subjugation has long been a feature of Irish theatrical history.⁷¹ Like G. B. Shaw's *Major Barbara*, therefore, Mahon's Irish tragicomedy was part of that same tradition. Disruptive translation is no better or worse than curative translation, just different.

One last poem rounds off this chapter: 'At the Gate Theatre', from Mahon's autobiographical sequence *The Yellow Book* (1997).⁷² In this poem, the speaker revisits *The Bacchae: after Euripides* and *Racine's Phaedra* (1996). And while reviewing his own tragedies, the poet reviews the genre as a whole. First, in the spirit of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and George Steiner's *The Death of Tragedy* (1961), the modern era has seen 'the death of tragedy and the Birth of

the Blues'. The 'comic Muse' has supplanted the 'tragic posture' and 'a whole theatrical tradition is in crisis'. Second, Greek drama is both fun and serious: 'The Greeks followed tragedies with satyr plays'; 'tragedy too, of course, is enormous fun'. Third, *Bacchae* reveals the rationalist playwright finally accepting Dionysus: 'after a lifetime of struggling with new ideas, / [he] sent out his Bacchae to the woods and glens / to dance devotion to the god of vines'. Fourth, 'life' is 'the only cure for tragedy'. Ultimately, *Bacchae* proves a point about tragedy's role in modern society. Tragedy may not cure, but it can at least entertain. It is telling that 'At the Gate Theatre' closes emphatically with a direct quote from Mahon's own *Bacchae*: 'Dionysus son of Semele is come. / Bring on ivy and goatskin, pipe and drum!'

Viewed retrospectively like this, *The Bacchae: after Euripides* looks rather like a poem of translation. In Mahon's post-tragic, anti-political milieu, 'Dionysus' is both a concrete object in the source text and also a metaphor for something outside it. (In both respects he is a fundamentally subversive figure.) Mahon applies that metaphor to translating *Bacchae*, the most Dionysiac of tragedies, in the spirit of Aristophanes' *Frogs*, the most Dionysiac of comedies. In his hands, Dionysiac translation uses textual verisimilitude to have subversive, anti-political *fun*. The result is unique: a parodic Irish-Greek tragedy which all but ignores the Troubles. In short, Mahon distils *Bacchae*, and literary and theatrical tradition, in a potent and unprecedented manner. His approach has been taken up by others, including David Greig (Chapter 7). As the following chapter will make clear, however, the next Irish writer to translate *Bacchae* admired Mahon's achievement but could not match it.

East and West

Colin Teevan, *Euripides: Bacchai* (2002)

In 2002, the Irish playwright Colin Teevan completed a 'new translation' of *Bacchae* for the National Theatre in London.¹ Unlike Derek Mahon's cheeky, rhyming *Bacchae*, Teevan's is deadpan. It is composed mostly in prose or free verse. And it views Greek tragedy through the lens of liberal, 9/11-era geopolitics. It was also staged immediately, at a high-profile theatre, with high-end production values and top-shelf personnel: Peter Hall directed; Harrison Birtwistle composed the music; Greg Hicks, an actor known for mask work, took the lead role.

Teevan, an accomplished playwright, translated *Bacchae* specifically for performance.² After writing a draft for the National Theatre, he twice revised it, first for an experimental workshop and then during a long rehearsal period. He attended rehearsals, joined in discussions, answered questions about the play and the Greek text, and even wrote extra material on request.³ Translating *Bacchae* also furthered an interest in Greek myth and drama, especially Euripides. Teevan had already worked as a dramaturg and co-writer on Peter Hall's *Tantalus* (2000) and translated Giuseppe Manfredi's *Zozos*, a play based on the Oedipus myth, as *Cuckoos* (2000). He later wrote *Missing Persons* (2005) and *Seven Pomegranate Seeds* (2006), both on Greek mythical subjects. More recently, he adapted Sophocles' *Oedipus* as *The Kingdom* (2012). Most importantly, he has also written English versions of the other two tragedies which were first produced with *Bacchae* in the late fifth century: *Iph...* (1999), 'A new version of *Iphigeneia in Aulis*', and a reconstruction of Euripides' lost play *Alcmaeon in Corinth* (2004, performed as *Cock of the North*).⁴

Teevan's *Bacchae* effectively became the second entry in a quasi-Euripidean trilogy of sorts to rival the only extant tragic trilogy, Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. This is significant. Peter Hall, Harrison Birtwistle and Greg Hicks had already collaborated, with great success, on Hall's celebrated 1981 National Theatre production of the *Oresteia* using Tony Harrison's brilliant, idiosyncratic translation. That is: the 2002 *Bacchae* and the 1981 *Oresteia* had the same director, lead actor, composer and theatre company; but different translators. In this chapter, I keep both the 1981 *Oresteia* and the Euripidean trilogy in view while addressing Teevan's *Bacchae* on three fronts: performance, translation and interpretation.

Bacchae has much in common with the *Oresteia*. Each was part of a prize-winning production in fifth-century Athens. Each is among the most frequently studied, read and adapted of ancient theatre works. Each is its respective poet's magnum opus and a master-text of classical antiquity. Many see *Bacchae* as Euripides' late-career return to Aeschylean principles. And for all intents and purposes, the director and composer approached *Bacchae* just as they had the *Oresteia* twenty-one years earlier. The initial idea came from a postcard sent by Birtwistle to Hall asking, 'Isn't it time we did another Greek play?'⁵ Both productions travelled to the outdoor theatre at Epidaurus. Principal actors and chorus-members again wore masks, and Hicks again demonstrated his considerable mask theatre ability. Actors declaimed in the same formal manner. Birtwistle's rhythmic 'pulse', as he calls it, punctuated both plays in performance; towards the end of the *Bacchae* score there is even a musical allusion to the final chorus in Birtwistle's *Oresteia* score.⁶ Again, there was not much dancing to be seen or singing to be heard.

What is more, Hall again put into practice the thoroughly idiosyncratic theory of Greek tragedy which he had developed in the 1981 *Oresteia* and since refined, most of all in his book *Exposed by the Mask: Form and Language in Drama* (2000).⁷ Hall's main criterion is form: form limits and controls materials; form frees and focuses performers. 'Only by the limitation of form can we express the limitless'; 'Without form there is no credibility, and no narrative. And so there is no involvement. And no drama.'⁸ Facilitated by dramatic form, restrained acting affects audiences more profoundly than emotive histrionics.

More specifically, dramatic form is itself a kind of mask:

[P]erformance always has to have the equivalent of a mask in order to transmit an emotion. It must have a mask, even if it is not a literal mask

...

Any defined form in the theatre performs as a mask: it releases rather than hides; it enables emotion to be specific rather than generalised. It permits control while it prevents indulgence. Form frees, it does not inhibit.⁹

Hall extends the mask metaphor to textual and even musical phenomena: 'The iambic pentameter is the mask of Shakespeare. The ensemble is the supreme mask of Mozart.'¹⁰ Actual masked drama becomes a special case of the general principle that performers, whose emotions are 'exposed' by a mask, must acquire a specific gestural language with which to communicate in it. 'Once the mask is accepted, the work with the actor, particularly the work with the Chorus, becomes very specific.'¹¹ At all times, the mask is a conduit for the real work of a dramatic *text*. The mask is 'an instrument of communication.'¹² Hall's theory is logocentric; whether real or metaphorical, masks contain emotion and focus our attention on words and ideas (*logoi*). And as we will see, Teevan likewise 'masked' *Bacchae* in restrained, prosaic language.

Hall analyses dramatic form coherently if unpersuasively. In its formalist underpinnings, his theory would appear, at first glance, entirely applicable to *Bacchae* and the *Oresteia*. But he misunderstands ancient dramaturgy. For one thing, he claims that Greek dramatic masks were 'neither comic nor tragic.'¹³ Ancient Greek comic masks and tragic masks were quite distinct, in fact, and satyr-play masks were recognizably different again. He makes an even bolder claim about choral songs: 'Some say they were sung. I don't believe it'; 'I believe that a single voice either spoke or sung or chanted every line that was complex.'¹⁴ This is nonsense. By definition, choral odes in fifth-century Athenian tragedy were sung and danced, together, by a chorus (*khōros*). And the essence of the *khōros* is *khōreia* (choral performance): '*khōreia* is made up of dance and song' (Plato, *Laws* 654b3–4).

Bacchae foregrounds Dionysian music and dance as much as, if not more than, any other surviving Greek tragedy. Unlike the choruses of the *Oresteia* (old men in *Agamemnon*, serving women in *Libation Bearers* and Erinyes in *Eumenides*), Euripides' *Bacchae* features a unique chorus of foreign women whose character in the play is intimately bound up in singing and dancing for Dionysus. (That is also what the citizen chorus-members were doing in the

Theatre of Dionysus when they performed *Bacchae* in Athens.) The Hall–Teevan–Birtwistle *Bacchae* featured a nominally ecstatic chorus, this time including women, in varying states of undress. Birtwistle sought a Dionysian sound world; incorporated more exotic instrumentation; used professional singers; and overall wrote an ‘appropriately orgiastic score, in contrast to the ordered world of the [1981] *Oresteia*’.¹⁵ Choreographed movements – swaying; creeping; suggestive poses – notwithstanding, however, the chorus-members danced infrequently. Nor did they often sing; the chorus typically chanted the songs one line at a time, one chorus-member at a time, following Birtwistle’s pulse. Four trained singers cast in the chorus even became frustrated that they were not singing enough.¹⁶

Some reviewers praised the formal restraint of Hall’s *Bacchae*; others criticized its emotional austerity and lack of contemporary relevance.¹⁷ Perhaps formalism and foreignness no longer powered mask theatre with the same electric thrill. Either way, this *Bacchae* evidently had little of Dionysus in it. Reviewing the production, Amanda Wrigley observed that:

The inertia of the chorus is all the more incomprehensible when they *speak* so much of Bacchic dancing, and it becomes almost unbearable when, as we imagine Pentheus being ripped apart in a Bacchic frenzy, they fail to obey their own screamed imperative to ‘Dance!’¹⁸

What was stylized, stately and spectacular in the *Oresteia* had become slow, static and ‘almost unbearable’ in *Bacchae*.

Tony Harrison’s *Oresteia* translation is another reference point for Teevan’s *Bacchae*. Translating directly from the Greek, Harrison echoes alliterative English poetry in general, and Robert Browning’s infamous translation of *Agamemnon* (1877) in particular, to produce an insistently rhythmic, consonant-heavy *Oresteia* seemingly well suited to Birtwistle’s ‘pulse’ technique. According to David Beard, in fact, it is entirely possible that ‘Harrison misread Birtwistle’s intentions’ and that ‘his metrical schemes forced the composer to adopt regular pulsation and reduced the possibilities for flexible and varied approaches’.¹⁹ Harrison’s standard metre for dialogue in the *Oresteia* is more regular and more musical than Teevan’s loose four/five/six-stress line. ‘[Harrison’s] basic line is, in fact, much less flexible than the epic metre of *Beowulf* (or Gerard Manley Hopkins’ “sprung rhythm”).’²⁰ On the one hand,

this metre risks self-parody in lines like ‘Scamander Scamander Cassandra’s Scamander.’²¹ On the other hand, no one reading Harrison’s *Oresteia* could ever mistake it for prose. This is equally true of choral passages:

Mewing warcries preybirds shrilling
 nest-theft childloss wild frustration
 nestlings snaffled preybirds soaring
 wildly sculling swirling airstreams²²

Teevan takes a quite different approach to tragic language. In conversation at the National Theatre, he described Euripides’ Greek as deceptively simple and asserted that the major issue for translators of *Bacchae* is its combination of everyday diction and formal metre.²³ (Aeschylus’ Greek is of course neither simple nor everyday.) He also claimed to have worked through the source text methodically, line by line. His *Bacchae* is clear and idiomatic, less like Browning’s *Agamemnon* and rather more like H.D.’s Euripides. And as is the case with H.D.’s *Bacchae* and *Iphigenia* choruses, Teevan’s *Bacchae* departs from *Iph* ... in subtle but significant ways.

The choruses of *Iph* ... are in metrical and mostly rhymed verse, but Teevan’s *Bacchae* choruses are mostly in free verse:

Swéet ríver,
 Óffspring óf the river gód,
 Ín your wáters
 You cóoled the són of Zéús,
 When hé was snátched
 From his móther’s búrning wómb,
 So that Zéús could then pláce him
 In his thíg and síng²⁴

36, stresses added

One could read this as accentual verse. (One can of course divide just about any chunk of English into accentual verse.²⁵) But these lines read most naturally as prose: ‘Sweet river – offspring of the river god – in your waters you cooled the son of Zeus when he was snatched from his mother’s burning womb so that Zeus could then place him in his thigh and sing’. Pound’s words come to mind: ‘Don’t think any intelligent person is going to be deceived when you try to shirk all the difficulties of the unspeakably difficult art of good prose by

chopping your composition into line lengths.²⁶ Birtwistle claims to have set the *Bacchae* choruses directly from Teevan's script so that he could 'find the rhythm of the verse' and teach these rhythms to the chorus-members.²⁷ In the near-absence of metre, however, one must effectively impose an arbitrary rhythm on Teevan's free-verse choruses. There is thus a certain incongruity in the heightened emphasis on drums and dancing in the translation. 'So let us play, so let us beat the drum' (17); 'You see? You begin to hear the drumbeat?' (17); 'Half the known world now dances to my drum' (18). The chorus 'followed Dionysus' drum' (19). Dionysus 'danced' to Bactria (17); the Theban women will 'dance my dance and cry my cry, they'll do my rites' (18).

Rebuking critics who called this a prose translation, Hall insisted that Teevan had composed dialogue in pentameters.²⁸ But this was an exaggeration. For example:

- DIONYSUS: Ráce mátters to thís god nó t a lót.
 PENTHEUS: And yóu perfórm these prácticés at níght?
 DIONYSUS: Mán's true náture's séen in dárkness nó t in líght.
 PENTHEUS: While dárkness shróuds a wóman's trúe dúplícítý.
 DIONYSUS: Dúplícítý is not fóund at níght exclúsívely!
 PENTHEUS: Yóu'll páy for yóur dáylight dúplícítý!
 DIONYSUS: And yóu for yóur hée dless impíetý!
 PENTHEUS: Yóu've a fóolhardy tóngue on yóu, my fóreign fríend.

34, stresses added²⁹

Few of these lines scan as pentameters, and only the penultimate rhyming couplet demands to be heard as poetry. Similar results obtain throughout the text. Rhyme is occasional and mostly restricted, as above, to stichomythia (alternating exchanges of single lines). There was less music overall in the 2002 *Bacchae* than in the 1981 *Oresteia*, and Birtwistle saved further time by 'not setting the speeches to a pulse or rhythm'.³⁰ Hall therefore had to enforce his preferred metre in rehearsal:

Peter keeps a beady eye on the *correct* scansion of the five-beat lines (they are rarely purely iambic), tapping out the rhythm with his fingers on the desk. He also regularly reminds both principals and Chorus to emphasise the line endings.³¹

In performance, however, the actors tended to blur line endings and suppress the 'correct scansion' in favour of natural speech rhythms.

The published text even includes an artificial, unpronounceable line break inside a word:

Or indulging their desires in the sol-
-itary woods, but, like I said, at peace.

42

This may be a typographical error, but it is suggestive. It would seem that everyone involved – translator, director, performers and perhaps even typesetter – has striven to ensure that Teevan's *Bacchae* looks and sounds like verse drama. During the rehearsal period, he even rewrote lines to make certain rhymes 'more overt', thereby making the text sound more overtly poetic.³² But occasional rhyme, typesetting and delivery alone do not a poem-translation make. The most we can confidently say about dialogue in Teevan's *Bacchae* is that the lines are mostly end-stopped and roughly the same length; can often, but not always, be read naturally with five stresses; and do occasionally rhyme.

In Euripides' *Bacchae*, after a servant announces that Pentheus is dead, the chorus-members burst into song, spontaneously enacting their joy in the excited dochmiac rhythm. I translate: 'Lord Bromius ['Roarer']! You appear: a mighty god' (*Bacch.* 1031). It is a crucial moment in the play.³³ Other translations more or less evoke the mood, if not the music:

All hail, God of the Voice,
Manifest ever more!

Gilbert Murray, 1902

All hail to Bromius! Our god is a great god!

William Arrowsmith, 1959

Pipe and drum, pipe and drum;
let Thebes know Dionysus, the lord of the dance, is come!

Derek Mahon, 1991

Dionysos, god of gods, you're here!

Frederic Raphael and Kenneth McLeish, 1998

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.
Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

David Greig, 2007

O Bromios!

You are revealed to eye, mind and judgment a great god!

Anne Carson, 2015

Teevan's chorus observes, in translationese: 'Dionysus you are made manifest' (55).³⁴ This is symptomatic. Throughout the translation, one listens in vain for the 'wild abandon of the play' (17) or the 'joyous comic bounce' which Teevan himself heard in Mahon's *Bacchae*.

Puns and other kinds of wordplay are treated in an equally prosaic fashion. One example is the pun on *Pentheus* and *penthos* ('grief') which occurs three times in the Greek text: 'Pentheus had better not bring your family grief (*penthos*)' (*Bacch.* 367–8); 'You are well named for bad luck' (508); 'O immeasurable grief (*penthos*)' (1244). These are not jokes. Dodds observes: 'To us a pun is trivial and comic because it calls attention to the irrelevant; but the Greek felt that it pointed to something deeply relevant.'³⁵ In that same spirit of 'deep relevance', Teevan's characters explain Greek puns for the benefit, presumably, of a Greekless external audience. Such prosaic explication (see Glossary), however, results in bathos:

TEIRESIAS

Pentheus connotes 'penthos' meaning grief, I hope not more grief.

29

DIONYSUS

Your name suggests grief. It will suit you well.

35

CADMUS

Pentheus, Penthos, Pentheos, meaning grief.

63

A similarly fulsome Greek lesson takes place when Tiresias explains Dionysus' second birth. In Teevan's *Bacchae*, we are told that this story apparently arose 'because the old word "mayros" for thigh, / Resembles the word "homayros" for pledge' (26).³⁶ More egregiously still, the first reporting figure invents a bizarre false etymology for the name 'Bacchae', an explanation which makes little sense per se and has no basis in the Greek:

The women, the Bacchai as some now call them,
Because they cry Iacchus Evoe

When they call upon their god and Iacchus,
 I suppose, sounds similar to Bacchus,
 And they being plural feminine are called Bacchai.
 Sorry. Yes. They were in three companies ...

41³⁷

Teevan also introduces a number of puns. 'Do the gods their rites / And they'll do right by you' (30). Pentheus: 'Zeus killed Semele for spreading that same lie.' Dionysus: 'As I said, she did lie. She lay with Zeus' (32). Pentheus: 'I am wise to you.' Dionysus: 'I am wise to that which is worth knowing' (40–1). There are clichés: Agaue twists off Pentheus' arm 'as one might a chicken's wing' (58); his disembodied head is 'A sight to break the heart' (62). And when Pentheus and Dionysus first meet, wordplay dominates proceedings:

PENTHEUS

But I'll reveal the truth so all shall see through him.

DIONYSUS

Have your truth. Look through me. I've nothing to hide.

PENTHEUS

We will see about that.

DIONYSUS

We will see only
 When we can see.

PENTHEUS

Well you see here: where are you from?

31–2

Despite the oracular, faux-ironic pose, neither has anything of real import to say, and the metaphor of seeing (which is indeed prevalent in the source text) dissolves into a banal punchline.³⁸ All in all, puns, clichés, explanatory digressions and pseudo-linguistics reduce the 'deep relevance' of Euripides' wordplay to a superficial function of prosaic language.

A prosaic logocentrism is also evident in the two main interpretative agendas which Teevan brings to *Bacchae*: metatheatre and geopolitics. He said in rehearsals that '*Bacchai* is Euripides' homage to theatre'. He even suggested

that the production obey Greek tragedy's 'Three-Actor Rule'.³⁹ And as Seamus Heaney did in *The Cure at Troy*, he bookends *Bacchae* with invented metatheatrical commentaries. Essentially, he reads *Bacchae* as a play about drama:

I then realised that the play was about the art of theatre: What is invention, what is reality, the paradox of how you see truth through artifice. So I came up with a device to frame it, based on the idea of Dionysus as the god of theatre.⁴⁰

In performance, the play began with Greg Hicks walking onto a bare stage, putting on a mask, and saying:

An empty space and all of you, and me.
And who am I? Dionysus son of Zeus;
God of the vine, god of dramatic rites,
God of the transformation from the humdrum
To the wild abandon of the play.
So let us play, so let us beat the drum

17

These lines use various tropes to flesh out a programmatic, explicitly metatheatrical interpretation of *Bacchae*. Dionysus first addresses the physical setting of the theatre ('an empty space') with a nod to Peter Brook's 1968 book, *The Empty Space*. Next, he refers to the audience and the actor: 'and all of you, and me'. He names his own role: 'And who am I? Dionysus'. He mentions the original performance context ('dramatic rites'). He acknowledges that this is a theatrical performance: 'the wild abandon of the play'. Finally, he encourages audience participation in the theatrical experience: 'let us play'; 'let us beat the drum'.

He continues:

I have come home and taken human form
So my true nature be made manifest,
So that I might suspend the disbelief
Of all who dare not believe in me.
Let's play, I said. Look and you'll begin to see.

17

At first, Dionysus paraphrases Euripides (e.g. *Bacch.* 4, 22, 42, 47–8). But then he introduces the modern idea of the suspension of disbelief, describing it as a

religious phenomenon: ‘suspend the disbelief / Of all who dare not believe in me.’ And he metaphorizes the theatrical illusion as a kind of mystery initiation: ‘Look and you’ll begin to see.’

Via symbolic shorthand, Judeo-Christian resonances emphasize this same metonymy: ‘You of little faith’ (24); ‘the grain that makes the bread of life’ (26); ‘the temple of our beliefs’ (27); ‘priestly frocks’ (28); ‘I put my faith in Dionysus’ (29); ‘where grace might be found’ (30). The final scene alludes to the story of Adam and Eve. Dionysus, exiling Cadmus and Agaue, paraphrases the book of Genesis:

Cadmus, your house is dust, your line is over.

...

So shall you both live belly to the earth,
Dust in mouth, beast-like in shape and nature,
Until delivered up to the hereafter.

68⁴¹

And where the Greek refers only to Bacchic rituals (*bakkheumata*, *orgia*, *teletai*) and not dramatic festivals, Teevan’s Dionysus explicitly names himself god of ‘dramatic rites’ (17, 68). He wants Thebes to learn ‘The full dramatic rites of Dionysus’ (18). In a further instance of prosaic explicitation, he explains his paradoxical role-within-a-role. Euripides’ Dionysus says that he has taken on human form (*eidos thnēton*, *Bacch.* 53; *andros physis*, 54). In Teevan’s *Bacchae*, he says:

For this reason I play the part
Of a priest of Dionysus,
Chief celebrant of my own rituals.

18

Teevan ultimately brings epiphany, civic cult and mystery religion under the wide umbrella of theatre and metatheatre: in *Bacchae*, everything is theatre and theatre is everything.

Teevan also invents a parallel speech (corresponding to the long lacuna in the final scene) in which Dionysus echoes his earlier words, reviews *Bacchae*, and reasserts his powers:

O sweet ululation. Do you not know me still?
In the form of a god I am revealed;
God of the vine, god of dramatic rites

God of the transformation from the humdrum
 To the wild abandon of the play.
 Look at them, do they not seem abandoned now?
 And you? Was not your disbelief suspended?
 Just a bit?

68

This Dionysus is a powerful god who wants to be recognized by characters and audience alike. All in all, he labours the point that he is real and in control; and he tells rather than shows:

I can conjure worlds in the imagination
 And destroy those worlds.
 (*The stage gradually returns to its original bare state.*)
 Do not deny me.
 Do not insult me. Do not deride my arts,
 My gifts. Do not attempt to silence me.
 Do not think that if you lock me up,
 I will go away ...
 Do not think that I am not important.
 I am part of you. I am in your mind.

68

In an obvious yet non-trivial sense, Dionysus' divinity in *Bacchae* is clearest when he is in character as himself in the prologue and final scene. Paradoxically, however, Teevan's metatheatrical framing scenes debunk the dramatic illusion; undermine the power of the theatrical god; and reinforce the gap between actor (Greg Hicks), character (Dionysus) and internal role (Stranger). One is reminded of a long-discredited rationalist interpretation which essentially holds that Dionysus is an impostor.⁴²

Teevan also frames *Iph ...* (1999) and *Alcmaeon in Corinth* (2004) with new material. Like its main source text *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Iph ...* is set at Aulis before the Trojan War. The play begins with a flash-forward to the fall of Troy and to Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. At Argos, a watchman paraphrases the opening lines of *Agamemnon* before the king himself is heard arriving offstage; the scene is in effect a compressed version of the early parts of Aeschylus' play. *Iph ...* ends with another flash-forward to *Agamemnon*, as the watchman talks about 'the last tragedy of all' before Agamemnon is killed by his wife offstage.⁴³

These scenes thus contextualize *Iphigenia in Aulis* within Greek mythical and theatrical tradition and dramatize its decadent, late aesthetic vis-à-vis Aeschylus. Though in one respect a prequel, *Iph* ... is also fundamentally 'after' the *Oresteia*. Another Irish playwright, Marina Carr, later reversed the technique: *Ariel*, a 2002 adaptation of the *Oresteia*, prefaces the onstage deaths of Fermoy ($\approx$ Agamemnon) and Frances ($\approx$ Clytaemnestra) with the offstage 'sacrifice' of Ariel ($\approx$ Iphigenia).⁴⁴

Alcmaeon in Corinth begins with rather more explicit metatheatre. Hera reads out fragments of Euripides' *Alcmaeon*, in English:⁴⁵

The Goddess HERA in the here and now, sifts fragments.

HERA

'The Gods avenge the pollution
Caused by the murder of a parent'

...

What sea-girt island is he from?
And why to Corinth has he come?⁴⁶

Editing and translating fragmentary texts is fraught, hard work, more so when reconstructing a whole play from only a few fragments. Tony Harrison's *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* (1998) confronts the issue head-on by not only staging the remnants of Sophocles' fragmentary satyr-play *Trackers* but also dramatizing the story of how the papyri were discovered in Egypt; it is a translation of *Trackers* nested in a historical drama about classical reception. In *Alcmaeon at Corinth*, Hera likewise reifies classical reception, translation and the passage of time, by physically 'sifting' through fragments of a lost text translated into English.⁴⁷

As a whole, Teevan's Euripidean trilogy addresses key questions about tragedy, reception and antiquity. In *Alcmaeon*, the mythical past is only ever partly recoverable in fragments. In *Iph* ..., past and future are one and the same, and myths exist in relation to other myths. Teevan's *Bacchae*, in turn, speaks to the present moment. All of which comes to a curious end:

The gods take many forms,
The gods move in strange ways,

That which seemed, does not transpire
 And that which does not, does.
 This is what transpired here.
 Turn out the lights.

70

The well-worn coda is of less interest here than the invented final line: 'Turn out the lights.' Spoken by a member of the chorus, these words answer Dionysus' opening salvo ('An empty space and all of you, and me') and reframe 'what transpired here', which in Greek is a *pragma* ('event, action'), as a theatrical performance (i.e. a *drama*). It is a flagrant, metatheatrical and anachronistic closural gesture. Turning out the lights on *Bacchae* proves, one last time, Dionysus' powers of illusion. 'I can conjure worlds in the imagination / And destroy those worlds.' But metatheatre has limits. At the final *Bacchae* performance in Epidauros:

At the end, as the actors slowly remove their masks for the last time, a smattering of applause begins before Chuk [Chuk Iwuji, chorus-member] can say 'Turn out the lights.' He holds up his hand to prevent it, but in vain: the applause builds relentlessly, and lasts for several minutes. But perhaps justice has been done: this last line is Colin's, not Euripides'. The Greeks know their *Bacchai* well ...⁴⁸

Teevan also reads *Bacchae* as a political play. More specifically: quite unlike Mahon's anti-political *Bacchae*, this translation articulates a liberal response to international geopolitics, especially East–West tensions after 9/11. For its part, Euripides' *Bacchae* dramatizes cultural conflict in late fifth-century Athenian terms, as conflict between Greeks and Eastern non-Greeks. Words for 'Asia Minor', 'Greece', 'Greeks' and 'barbarians' (i.e. non-Greeks) are frequent in the source text.⁴⁹ (In reality, ancient Greece was as much a Near Eastern as a European civilization.⁵⁰) As such, the play has been seen as a foundational text of Orientalism.⁵¹ Teevan's *Bacchae* is an equally Orientalizing text, with the words 'East', 'West' and 'Western' mapping Greece and the Near East onto modern hemispheric political geography.⁵²

Euripides' play is set in Thebes; in fifth-century terms, the wooden stage building represents the palace. The 2002 *Bacchae*, however, took place in a sociocultural, geopolitical and dramaturgical no-man's land between wild East and civilized West. 'An empty space and all of you, and me ... where the

city ends and the wild begins, / A place poised between two worlds' (17). The set design at the National Theatre made this a concrete reality: the auditorium (and the audience) was the city; backstage was the wild; the acting area was the all-important liminal space in between.⁵³ Birtwistle's music, with its notionally Eastern elements, added to the impression of otherness.⁵⁴ So did the chorus's masks and costumes.

In Teevan's text, the East is equally foreign: 'You see? You begin to hear the drumbeat? / The drumbeat I first fashioned in the East, / In the depths of darkest Asia' (17). The mention of drums and a well-worn cliché ('depths of darkest Asia') make the Near East sound more like the Congo in *Heart of Darkness*. But the East is also a romantic tourist destination: Dionysus' travels have 'described an incandescent arc / Across the deserts of Arabia' (17). There is entertainment and enlightenment:

The East soon came to know my mysteries,
Half the known world now dances to my drum.
As for the other half, as for you.

(*He stops dancing.*)

This city here shall be the first
Of all the western world to cry my cry

18

There is tolerance: 'Race matters to this god not a lot' (34).⁵⁵ There is even feminist agrarian communism:

Mothers, daughters, wives, sisters, serving girls
One and all, regardless of their station,
Living rough amidst the rocks and pines
Under a roofless sky.

18

One of the basic assumptions of Greek myth, literature and drama is that Greeks are superior to non-Greeks. Modern Orientalist discourse similarly privileges the West. Teevan's liberal *Bacchae* reverses this polarity, dramatizing an Orientalist fiction in which a utopian East is defined in opposition to a morally bankrupt West; and East and West are not so much geographical hemispheres as conceptual rubrics heavily laden with historical, political and sociocultural baggage. In this context, Teevan takes Pentheus as the natural spokesman (and straw man) for racist, conservative xenophobia: he opposes

immigration, repudiates foreign religion, and assumes a false dichotomy between West and East. 'He'll soon regret / The day he brought his filthy foreign practices / To our city in the West' (28); 'You've a foolhardy tongue on you, my foreign friend (34); 'Let him teach them his foreign ways ... He will respect the West before he dies' (35).⁵⁶ The *Bacchae*, in turn, sing graciously and open-mindedly of 'the wide streets of the West' (20) and ask, 'City of the West / Why do you turn from me?' (36).⁵⁷

In rehearsal, Peter Hall described *Bacchae* as a play about psychology and violence, but also about war and the price of freedom:

Bacchai is about freedom, and the price you pay for it – emotionally, sexually, politically. It shows the danger of repressed emotions, but also the destruction and violence that follow when we release them. It's about everything that is in the papers every morning, but just more hideously so at the moment.⁵⁸

'At the moment', when rehearsals began, was March 2002. Teevan had twice revised the translation since September 2001, and 9/11 was a major subtext (or pretext, even).⁵⁹ Hall also said, 'It's about East and West, order and freedom, reason and emotion, faith and instinct, male and female, life and death. The task of doing the play is to balance these contradictions.'⁶⁰ That is: one reason for translating and performing *Bacchae* is to reconcile East and West. A noticeboard in the rehearsal space contained 'newspaper articles about the conflict in Afghanistan and the Middle East'.⁶¹ David Ryall (Cadmus/Soldier/Herdsmen) offered to 'do my American soldier guarding suspected terrorists at Guantanamo Bay'.⁶² In a post-9/11 context, then, 'our city in the West' (28) – on the face of it, Thebes – calls to mind Western mega-cities like London, Los Angeles, Paris and, most of all, New York. But Teevan, tellingly, omits the very passages in the source text which foretell a foreign army attacking Greece (*Bacch.* 1330–8, 1354–60). This pro-Dionysus, Orientalizing *Bacchae* refuses even to entertain the possibility that unprovoked military aggression does, sometimes, come from the East.

Conall Morrison's *The Bacchae of Baghdad* (2006), which played at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, used a literal substitution to map *Bacchae* onto the Middle East. The play was set in Iraq. Pentheus (Robert O'Mahoney) was a US military commander; he spoke with an American accent; his entrance was lit by McDonald's-style neon arches. Dionysus (Christopher Simpson) wore

dreadlocks and attempted a Middle-Eastern accent; he was dragged onstage wearing an orange jumpsuit like a Guantanamo detainee; his *Bacchae* whirled like dervishes. Critics were ungentle. 'This is orientalism and occidentalism writ large: a didactic reduction of the original text and current political situation.'⁶³

Teevan applies post-9/11 geopolitics to *Bacchae* on a different scale and to different ends. The play is not an overt adaptation but a 'new translation' for a masked National Theatre production. And it 'cures' East-West conflict, much as *The Cure at Troy* 'cured' Unionist-Republican conflict, through metatheatre: by sublimating the 'humdrum' realities of 'the moment' into the 'wild abandon of the play'. Edith Hall, a scholar known for leftist readings of Greek tragedy who wrote introductions for Teevan's three Greek plays, claims: '[*Bacchae*] simply stages one terrible occasion on which an introspective and xenophobic community resisted, derided, disrespected and excluded innovation and difference – ethnic, cultural, religious, and psychological – and in consequence suffered catastrophe.'⁶⁴ In the same way, Teevan translates *Bacchae* as a pacifist, liberal-democratic manifesto in which honouring 'Dionysus' through drama is one way of fighting intolerance and violence.

To conclude: the 2002 Hall-Teevan-Birtwistle *Bacchae* exemplifies a tendency for bringing scholarship and current events to bear, simultaneously, on the play; and for conducting creative translation via Dionysiac metonymy. Governed by moderate, high-brow, nominal authenticity, Hall's production used various techniques to approximate a number of original performance conditions. Witness, for example, the masks, the treatment of the chorus, the use of three principal actors, the faux-Eastern score and so on. Teevan's translation, on the other hand, privileges moderate, high-brow, *expressive* authenticity, which can be heard in the linguistic register, fluent style, puns and so on; and, especially, in invented speeches and allusions to contemporary issues. In Teevan's *Bacchae*, the god of theatre restages his favourite tragedy as a metatheatrical mystery play, enacting the power of drama to 'conjure worlds in the imagination and destroy those worlds' and in the process converting the West to a new, secular faith. In effect, he rewrites Euripides' play as a prophetic, synecdochic performance of its own ideal reception.

These Go to Eleven

David Greig, *Euripides: The Bacchae* (2007)

Adaptations and translations of *Bacchae* have campaigned for many causes over the years: archaism, formalism, radical theatre, ritual, violence, tragedy, tragicomedy, metatheatre, metatragedy et cetera. But no English translation has campaigned simultaneously on as many platforms as *Euripides: The Bacchae*, a ‘version’ by Scottish playwright David Greig.¹ From within the notional boundaries of textual verisimilitude, Greig pastiches the play’s entire modern afterlife, from *Pentheus: A Burlesque in Three Acts* to *Dionysus in 69* to Wole Soyinka’s *Communion Rite* and beyond.

A man hangs from a rope secured above the stage, suspended upside down, bare-bottomed. It is the Scottish–American actor Alan Cumming. (According to one reviewer, ‘this was no ordinary rear end. No, this was a purebred local bum belonging to one of Scotland’s most celebrated thespians.’²) He descends, finds his feet, and faces the audience. ‘So, Thebes,’ he says, with a wry smile, ‘I’m back’; he teases out the last word, sing-song fashion. He adds: ‘Dionysos, / You do know me’ (7). And then, after recounting the story of his birth, he says:

I am, of course, a god.

...

For your benefit I appear

In human form. Like you. Fleishy.

Man? Woman? – It was a close-run thing.

I chose man. What do you think?

His costume leaves little to the imagination; he twirls coquettishly. *Bacchae* begins.

Greig's work has been performed at major venues in Britain and worldwide. Born in Edinburgh, he was raised in Nigeria and attended university in England; he speaks of having a troubled 'relationship to the concept of home'.³ Yet he remains a distinctly Scottish playwright.⁴ His play *Dunsinane* (2010) is a sequel to 'the Scottish play' *Macbeth*. And in 2007, the National Theatre of Scotland (NTS) performed his translation of *Bacchae* as part of its second-ever season.

Like *Macbeth* and *Dunsinane*, Greig's *Bacchae* is a Scottish play.⁵ The high-profile, big-budget performance headlined the Edinburgh Festival, selling out the King's Theatre before the first show. John Tiffany, Associate Director of New Work, directed. Among other plays, he also directed the early NTS success, *Black Watch* (2006) and, later, an acclaimed *Macbeth* (2012) starring none other than Cumming himself. Like those productions, the NTS *Bacchae* travelled well, taking national culture on the road with a Scots-heavy cast to Glasgow, London, Aberdeen, Inverness and New York.⁶ And though the post-devolution years since 1998 had seen a number of notable Scottish translations of classical plays, this was the first *Bacchae* at the Edinburgh Festival since 1974 and only the sixth Scottish *Bacchae* recorded on the APGRD.⁷ England, by contrast, had seen more than seventy *Bacchae* productions by 2007.

The NTS *Bacchae* was also a star vehicle for Cumming (Dionysus). In an interview about the 2006 season, John Tiffany said:

Everybody expected us to do the big shows. In fact they would even talk about which Chekhov play will it be, at the Festival Theatre, with the red carpet, and some Scottish actor having made it in Hollywood coming back ... All of it being very much a version of other National Theatres, and we said, no, fuck that ...⁸

Nevertheless, when selecting, casting and staging *Bacchae*, the production team met that exact expectation to do a 'big show'.⁹ Cumming was a 'Scottish actor' who had 'made it in Hollywood', and his name burnished the production's big-budget sheen. Now famous for the role of Eli Gold in the television series *The Good Wife* (2009–2016), Cumming was then best known internationally for music theatre and for screen roles such as Saturninus in Julie Taymor's splashy *Titus* (1999). He had been based in the United States for some time by 2007 and gained citizenship shortly thereafter.¹⁰ Despite his dual nationality,

international fame and code-switching abilities, Cumming was still known as a Scottish actor. 'Cumming announces "So, Thebes, I'm back", subtly reminding us that the actor is returning to his native Scotland after 16 years.'¹¹ In 2012 he played every major role in John Tiffany's *Macbeth* in Scotland and on Broadway.

Greig is a playwright and director. He has been a dramaturg for the NTS; he translated *Bacchae* for specific actors to perform. 'In the day I would go over the lines reading them aloud to myself in a whisper and trying to make them fit the voices of Alan [Cumming], Tony [Curran] and Paola [Dionisotti].'¹² His *Bacchae* is, for want of a better phrase, a highly theatrical translation alive to the dramaturgical potency of scenic space, stage business, metatheatre, Scottish accents and speech rhythms, and much else besides. 'I wanted to honour Euripides not only as a philosopher but also as a playwright.'¹³ And as one might expect from a National Theatre production headlining the Edinburgh Festival, both director and translator avowedly sought fluency and fidelity:

I asked John [Tiffany] if he wanted me to set the play anywhere ... [H]e just wanted to tell the story as it was. So at that moment I set myself what I thought was a simple and safe task: to translate *Bacchae* in such a way that every line was understandable as it hit the ear of the audience.¹⁴

In practice, this apparently 'safe and simple' skopos underwrites a creative, radically authentic translation.

Following a well-established tradition, Greig's *Bacchae* is a self-proclaimed 'version'. (He has also written English versions of Camus's *Caligula* and Strindberg's *Creditors*.) Less typically, he worked not from earlier *Bacchae* translations but from a made-to-order crib, with notes, by Ian Ruffell, a Glasgow-based classicist who specializes in Greek drama. Ruffell himself aimed 'to get as much as possible of the flavour and the spirit of the original'; 'One of the things I was trying to keep was the flavour of the play's word-order and line-structure.'¹⁵ In effect, Ruffell became a more or less 'invisible' translator who provided a kind of pseudo-authentic, seemingly unmediated access to the text on Greig's part: 'Reading a section with [Ruffell's] notes and references I felt as though I knew the play nearly as well as if I were reading the original Greek.'¹⁶ At first, Greig described his working methods in terms of conventional literary translation norms (in effect, fluency and invisibility):

[W]henever I have read Greek tragedy, I have not been able to follow it; I don't quite know what is going on. So, I thought: I will not do anything creative to the play; I won't change any units of meaning. I genuinely believed that that would be a quite minor process but it turned out to be surprisingly radical. The translation I have done is quite different from the existing ones.¹⁷

'Quite different' is a strong understatement. He later wrote:

My simple rule forced me to be much more free with the translation than I had first thought ... Attending to the effect of the poetry did mean that some meaning was lost. I have sometimes sacrificed particular units of meaning, line orders, and segments of mythological exploration [*sic*] in favour of keeping humour, or pace alive ... I tried to structure the drama so as to embody Euripides' visceral, funny, sexy dramatic energy.¹⁸

All of which adds up to an oxymoronic skopos. Do not change meaning; sacrifice meaning. Leave *Bacchae* untouched; make it visceral, funny, sexy and energetic. What matters is meaning; what matters is spirit.

Greig assumes a basic distinction between the original and the translation, and between the source-language poet and the target-language translator: 'So – whatever they might think of this work and wherever they might be, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Euripides and Dionysos for allowing me the privilege of this strange communion.'¹⁹ But this idea of a 'strange communion', which is really authenticity by another name, entails distance and proximity, separation and connection: though far away, Euripides and Dionysus are implicated in the new work. One reads here an aspiration to have complete creative freedom without setting aside any of the cultural authority of a classical source text.

In an interview about his adaptations, Greig said:

My guiding principle in adaptation is to try to discover the effect which the original author was hoping to achieve and then to bring that effect to a modern audience ... My lines may differ from the original in direct literal meaning, but that is less important to me than that I honour the original effect.²⁰

On this view, the aim of adapting a classic play is dynamic equivalence (see Introduction): honouring the 'original effect' which the author 'hoped' to bring about. But unlike *Oedipus the Visionary* (see p. 148), Greig's *Bacchae* is not an

adaptation. Its setting, structure and *dramatis personae* are more or less the same as those of Euripides' play; Ruffell's scholarly translation, and the 'strange communion' it allowed, encouraged a degree of formal equivalence. In effect, Greig's *Bacchae* subordinates creative translation, dynamic and formal equivalence, domesticating and foreignizing strategies, modernizing and archaizing strategies, and so on, to a higher-order principle: radical authenticity.

Ruffell, describing the initial overture about making the literal translation, said:

[O]ne of the things they [Tiffany and Greig] kept saying, they really stressed, when we met, is that they wanted to be authentic, they wanted to be faithful and they wanted to be as close to the spirit of it as they could be. And to what it would have been like to watch Greek drama without it being an archaeological activity.

...

[John Tiffany] wanted to do Greek drama because he wanted to show how it should be done rather than necessarily how he'd been taught it. Perhaps it's this idea of authenticity ... which is not the same as, shall we say, what critics would expect of Greek drama.

...

Yes, by being most faithful it's being most radical ...²¹

One reads an equally radical authenticity in Greig's iconoclastic version: not a sensible compromise between nominal and expressive authenticity, as in the Hall–Teevan–Birtwistle *Bacchae*, but a combination of multiple, seemingly contradictory authenticities. All in all, it is a maximalist, high-stakes approach to translation which seeks to wrest as many meanings as possible from a single source text while still keeping faith with the audience, with the translator, with Euripides and with 'Dionysus'.²²

Where Tony Harrison's equally iconoclastic *Oresteia* funnels authenticity into a strict verse form and a well-defined sound world, Greig's *Bacchae* dissolves in a multiplicity of Dionysian signs: not just ambiguity (double meaning) or polysemy (many meanings) but a large-scale instance of what Jean-Claude Chouh calls *hypersemiosis* (literally, 'too much signification').²³ Hypersemiosis, 'the contextual or syntagmatic equivalent of polysemy', entails 'a basic overloading pattern preventing a satisfactory paraphrase'.²⁴ At the phrasal level, this includes *zeugma*, *paronomasia*, paradox, pleonasm and,

crucially, mixed metaphor. At the whole-text level, Greig's *Bacchae* is similarly 'overloaded' with formalism, anti-realism, sexual liberation, Christianity, pluralism, syncretism, LGBT identity, camp, drag queens, Hollywood stardom, gospel music and Edvard Munch's *The Scream*.

From the very start, formal headings imply a serious, scholarly approach to the structure of Greek tragedy: PROLOGUE, PARADOS [*sic*], THE FIRST EPISODE, THE FIRST STASIMON, and so on, right down to the EXODOS. (For the misspelling PARADOS, read PARODOS = *πάροδος*.) These headings, which are regularly used in classical scholarship but infrequently in English translation, heighten the non-realist formalism of Greek tragedy and exaggerate the impression of textual verisimilitude. They look foreign, old and *real*. But the archaism is a false one. The Greek words probably did not have these technical meanings in Euripides' day. The Byzantine manuscripts do not include them. And Aristotle's *Poetics*, the major authority for terms such as 'episode' (*epeisodion*), 'parodos', 'exodos' and so on, dates to the fourth century BC, not the fifth.

In a similar vein, Greig prefers archaizing, foreignizing, formally equivalent Greek spellings for proper names: Dionysos (Dionysus), Kadmos (Cadmus), Teiresias (Tiresias), Kithairon (Cithaeron), Ekhion (Echion), and so on.²⁵ But equivalence becomes parody in the case of Dionysus' other Greek name, Bakkhos (Βάκχος). Not only do the words 'Bakkhos' and 'Bakkhai' regularly appear in this translation, but one also finds 'Bakkhant', 'Bakkhic' and the unprecedented, newly coined adverb 'Bakkhically'. In Anne Carson's *Bacchae* (Chapter 8), the recurring key-word 'daimonic' is a serious philosophical rubric. Here, 'Bakkhic' is a Scots-accented punchline: when Cadmus suggests taking a wagon up the mountain, Tiresias replies, 'No – let's walk. I think / To walk would be more Bakkhic' (13). And when Pentheus sees his grandfather's Dionysiac costume, he exclaims, 'How very Bakkhic' (16). In this as in other respects, Greig's *Bacchae* combines foreignization and domestication in service of radical authenticity.

Being authentic also means giving Euripides extra gags. 'I have added some jokes,' Greig said, 'but I bet no-one will spot them. They will all think they are straight from Euripides.'²⁶ Dionysus is 'Cut from [Zeus'] immortal crotch, / A chip off the old block' (8). 'Careful,' he warns Pentheus. 'This hair belongs to Dionysus, / It's styled just the way he likes it' (30). When asked what sort of mysteries he practises, he replies, 'Mysterious mysteries' (26). Ruffell shares with many scholars (including myself) the view that *Bacchae* contains not only

humorous elements, as Bernd Seidensticker argues, but also, in fact, elements which properly belong to Greek comedy: ‘*Bacchae* is the Greek tragedy in which a lot of elements are derived from the comic rather than the tragic stage.’²⁷ For Greig, in turn, this view justifies modernizing *Bacchae* according to present-day expectations of comedy:

The play is understood by people who read Greek as being very funny, very outrageous, very camp. When we were working on it, I would keep finding material that, as a dramatist, I immediately thought of in terms of a gag. It was all there ... A lot of the jokes have been missed in the past because if you make a literal translation you are not looking at the text from a theatrical perspective.²⁸

Even the driest *Bacchae* translation lends itself, in certain scenes at least, to a comic interpretation. But claiming that those of us who read *Bacchae* in Greek consider it very outrageous or very camp is a long bow to draw.

In terms of poetic technique, Greig’s *Bacchae* exuberantly combines traditional and modern verse forms including free verse, unrhymed iambic verse, traditional rhyming verse and prose poetry; and a keen desire to put the fun back into tragic language. In particular, he writes ear-catching dialogue, alert to speech rhythms, punchlines and sound effects; and alert to histrionics as well. At line 644 of Euripides’ *Bacchae*, for example, Pentheus notices Dionysus (now escaped) onstage. He cries out:

ea, ea!

That’s the man right there. What’s going on? How did you get outside? What are you doing out here by the doors of my palace?

Bacch. 644–6

Pentheus’ inarticulate cry (‘*ea, ea!*’) expresses surprise: ‘a gasp of astonishment, perhaps representing the sound of a sharp intake of breath.’²⁹ Many translators ignore the line; some render *ea* as ‘ah!’ or ‘oh!’, Teevan simply folds the Greek into English, as is.³⁰ Greig, in a telling gesture (see below on ‘the Scream’), amplifies Pentheus’ wordless vocalizations into a scream:

Pentheus sees Dionysos. He screams.

What?

How?

You?
 Here?
 Now?
 How dare you?

41

Alliteration and assonance also feature prominently, without any particular prompting from Euripides' Greek.³¹ One deft sequence uses alliteration, sibilance, *w* sounds, diphthongs and sinuous internal rhyme to describe the maenads playing with snakes:

dappled dresses with
 Live snakes which willingly wound round
 Their waists and even sometimes seemed
 To kiss them

45

Pentheus sounds his anger in plosive consonants (*p* and *b*). Among other choice words, he calls Dionysus a 'popinjay preacher' (20) and a 'bastard Bakkhant foreign priest' (40).³²

Dionysus himself puts sound-play to more humorous uses. He accumulates liquid and nasal consonants (*l, r, m, n*) when describing his travels and his chorus: 'I've crossed Arabia and lingered / in the Levant' (9); 'O my Maenads, / Lydian ladies, / Do I see you laid low by fear?' (38). He alliterates punningly on 'Pentheus'.³³ He coins not one but two Scots-accented triple tongue-twisters, first explaining that Semele's sisters 'used Zeus as an excuse' (9) and then, later, speaking of Pentheus' 'Bakchic bondage blunder' (40).³⁴ Onstage, Cumming's Dionysus spoke in a working-class Glaswegian accent, while Tony Curran's Pentheus spoke with the nasal tones and narrow attitudes suggestive of the Calvinist Scottish bourgeoisie. It was this repressive tradition that Cumming's voice was out to subvert.³⁵ Occasional rhyme enlivens proceedings throughout, such as the mosaic rhyme 'impress us' / 'dresses' (56), the eye rhyme 'laughter' / 'slaughter' (56) and the shared internal rhyme 'ankle' / 'fankle' (59). Overall, Mahon's influence can be heard much more clearly here than in Teevan's restrained, serious *Bacchae*.

Greig translates the choral songs as formal, poetic lyrics destined for performance in an R&B-derived musical idiom. Two are entirely in verse. The third shares a stanzaic form with Shakespeare's poem 'Spring' (ABABCCADD,

etc). Incorporated into these choral passages, even continuous paragraphs of prose take on the aspect of prose poems:

Come, Thebans, come out of your houses, let the
ceremonies begin, cover yourselves in ivy, burst with
green, burst with red berries, burst with bright flowers

10

Dionysiac religion is another outlet for radical authenticity and hypersemiosis. Broadly speaking, Greig's *Bacchae* posits Dionysus as a new, post-Christian deity who reintroduces religion to secularized neoliberal society. Despite consistently and egregiously transliterating the name *Bakkhos*, he translates Dionysus' other name *Bromios* ('The Roarer') into a highly suggestive leitmotif and running joke: 'the Scream'. This new name for Dionysus recalls Edvard Munch's famous series of paintings *Der Schrei der Natur*, usually called *The Scream* in English; and the masks, modelled on Munch's paintings, used in the *Scream* film and television universe. The name also activates the outmoded colloquial sense of 'a scream' to mean something or someone funny (*OED*, s.v. 'scream', *n.*). Pentheus screams in rage and frustration (see p. 137), but the Scream is a ritual shout of release: 'To worship you is always to be wild'; 'Mortals live and mortals dream / My heart's content to hold the Scream' (57). Above all, frequent innuendo endows the Scream with erotic connotations: 'I hear that / Day and night, one by one, they [the Theban women] scream / In rapturous communion / As he enters them' (16). As the final lines of the translation remind us, the Scream (not unlike Munch's paintings) is a multivalent, universal, iconic archetype:

No – you can't choose the gods that you worship
No – you just have to worship them all
No – you can't choose which prayers they will answer
No – you just have to answer their call
No – you can't choose the gods that you worship.

So you must learn to sing
You must sing this hymn
This hymn to the Scream.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

includes the words ‘Thou art gentle, meek and mild; / Thou wast once a little child’.) There is a strong metrical similarity also.³⁶ Euripides’ ode, then, has become a hymn (in the proper sense) to the Scream which conflates divine retribution, ecstatic religion and the image of the divine child. Not that Gilbert Murray’s genteel faux-piety is much in evidence: ‘To worship you is always to be wild.’

There is room for pluralism alongside syncretism. The chorus exhorts: ‘you can’t choose the gods that you worship / No – you just have to worship them all ... So you must learn to sing ... This hymn to the Scream’ (88). There is scepticism also. ‘If any gods are watching me,’ says Cadmus, ‘Look at my dead son and ask / Yourself what it means to be / Divine? This is what it means. This’ (82). The point is subtly, but importantly, different in Greek: ‘If there is anyone who dismisses the gods, look at this man’s death and believe that they exist’ (*Bacch.* 1325–6). As a ‘new god,’ the Scream supplants Zeus himself: ‘Our god is the best god,’ the chorus insists, ‘the son of Semele and Zeus, he is the greatest god. He is the Scream’ (21). In short, Greig’s *Bacchae* is ecumenical in its religion. Dionysus is real, present and powerful, even in a postmodern, secular age. He is like, but unlike, Christ. He liberates. He helps us find ourselves. Following the Scream in the twenty-first century entails anything from irony and scepticism to syncretism, pluralism and self-actualization.

More than anything, following the Scream entails letting go sexually. In one passage, for example, the Bacchae ask the ‘Mother’ – in Greek, *Hosia* (‘Purity’) – for a riverside religious experience. In the spirit of Al Green’s R&B classic ‘Take Me to the River’ (1974), this experience is to be both baptismal and fundamentally erotic:³⁷

O Mother

Take me down to a place I can make love in
 Take me down to the meadows by the river
 Take me down to where the songs flow like water
 Take me down to where the Scream resides
 Take me down to where my wanting lies
 Take me down Bakkhai! Bakkhai! Bakkhai!

22

In point of fact, Greig’s Dionysus is one of the campest, most oversexed gods in theatre since *Dionysus* in 69. Cumming, who identifies as bisexual, is known

for LGBT activism and for having a witty stage and screen persona marked by ambiguities of sexual orientation and gender identity. (In 1998, he won a Tony Award for playing The Emcee in *Cabaret*, a role which he reprised in 2014–15.) Greig wrote the part of Dionysus for him to play: ‘With Alan Cumming in the central role, it was not likely to need extra camp. So, if anything, I pulled back on some of the more outrageous aspects of the original.’³⁸ This is special pleading. If anything, the outrageous aspects have been pushed forward, not pulled back. The book cover image speaks volumes: Cumming as Dionysus in a bare concrete cell, made up with bright blue eyeshadow and red lipstick, hand on hips in a flamboyant three-quarter pose, naked buttocks exposed, backless red dress blowing in the wind. He never wore the outfit in the original Edinburgh production, but this image was prominent in advertising materials all the same.³⁹ In a sense, Alan Cumming *is* the Scream.

Accordingly, Greig has scripted Dionysus as a pan-sexual character teasing his hetero-normative male cousin. Dionysus’ own gender performance and sexual orientation are fluid: ‘Man? Woman? – It was a close-run thing. / I chose man. What do you think?’ (7). He specializes in schoolboy innuendo and double-entendre the likes of which are nowhere to be found in the Greek or, for that matter, in any other English translation of *Bacchae*. ‘In human form. Like you. Fleshy’ (7). ‘Don’t be so coy, big boy’ (8). ‘[H]er lover’s Coming; ‘when he came – he came / As lightning’ (8). ‘[A]s he enters them’ (16). ‘Perverted / Paraphernalia’ (17). ‘[E]nters us; ‘Enters you – / Sounds nice; ‘From the front? Or from behind?’ (26). ‘Enter me; ‘enter you / Spiritually’ (27). ‘A woman’s hole is more easily / Opened?’ (29). ‘Better to be open’ (52).

One consequence of translating *Bacchae* like this, with Alan Cumming in mind, is a blurring of sex, gender, orientation and sexuality. The cross-dressing scenes, as Pentheus prepares for his ‘transvestite mission’ (61), play out like an episode of the television show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (with shades of *The Rocky Horror Show* and *Cabaret*). ‘Let’s see,’ says Dionysus. ‘Looks best, yes – let your hair down / For me? Hmm –’ (53); ‘Oh yes. Princess! / You look ravishing’ (58). Cross-dressing is conflated with gender identity and with drunken misadventures:

But first we ask you – take his mind
And open it – make him giddy,
Bring out his feminine side.

...

He's too desperate to impress us
 But when young men get drunk don't they
 Just love to put on dresses.

56

At the same time, Pentheus comes out to Dionysus in both senses of the phrase. 'Come out!' Dionysus says, 'You know you want to' (58). 'It's nice to see / You coming out of yourself finally' (60). Their trip up the mountain, too, is to be erotic: 'What will it be like – just think? Like catching sight of forest birds, / Sweet naked birds caught in the act / Of making love, unaware of my eyes watching' (61). Under the watchful eye of Dionysus, Pentheus appears to have simultaneously discovered cross-dressing, transgender identity, bisexuality and voyeurism.

The *Scream* is a theatrical god, and, despite the archaizing headings, Greig uses modern theatrical resources and a variety of stage business to embody the power of the *Scream*. Strictly speaking, Euripides' *Bacchae* takes place at one location: outside, in front of Pentheus' palace. Greig's *Bacchae* traverses four locations: Semele's house, '*A house ruined by fire with smoke rising from its burnt timbers*' (7); outside, in front of the palace (12); the palace prison (21); and the palace proper (23). Stage action ranges from simple to decidedly extravagant. One stage direction has Dionysus shooting lightning at Pentheus' palace until it goes up in flames (37).⁴⁰ In another, Dionysus magically '*covers the tomb [of Semele] in flowers*' (8). This is both a camp flourish and a visual allusion to a specific anti-realistic trope in modern British drama: Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* (1998) and Gary Owen's *Cancer Time* (2004) include remarkably similar miracles in which flowers spontaneously appear onstage.⁴¹

Greig also introduces a raft of theatrical metaphors. In one ten-line sequence, for example, Pentheus and Dionysus refer to ticket fees, performance, applause, the theatre, acting, learning lines and playwriting:

PENTHEUS

You twist words cleverly, stranger,
 But I'll make you *pay a high price*
 For this preening *performance*.

DIONYSUS

I'll pay, but you'll pay too, my friend,
A fine for failing to *applaud*
A *theatrical* god.

PENTHEUS

He's bold, this Bakkhic *actor* from abroad.
He's *learned his lines* – I'll give him that –
But now I'm in charge. I'm *writing*
The script.⁴²

29, emphasis added

In this and other such passages, the metatheatrical interpretation of *Bacchae* is writ very large indeed.

In particular, Dionysus applies theatrical metaphors to Pentheus. He leans heavily on the word 'tragedy' when predicting Pentheus' death: 'Oh, poor prince [i.e. Pentheus], you still don't see ... You have no idea / Of the part you're playing in this / Tragedy' (32). And again: 'My enemy does not know me, / That's his tragedy' (42).⁴³ Most egregiously of all:

Tragic.

Poor Pentheus, you're such a *star*,
But you have no idea how
Tragic you really are. You're
About to walk into a *scene*
Of suffering so horrible
So awful, so cruel, so terrible,
Your *story* will be *heard* in heaven.
A *tragedy*. Your *name in lights*
For ever.

62–3, emphasis added

Directed by Dionysus, Pentheus' final performance makes him 'a star' in the Hollywood mould, his name 'in lights for ever', his untimely death fundamentally 'tragic'. But overuse has weakened the word 'tragedy' in English, while 'tragic' has taken on a specific colloquial meaning stereotypically associated with queer culture: 'pathetically inadequate or unfashionable' (*OED*, s.v. 'tragic', *adj.*). Pentheus is, as they say, a fashion victim. According to Dionysus, moreover, he

is a fabulous drag queen about to perform his 'drag act' (58) for the last time. His death will be a 'gorgeous' finale:

Me – I'll go to the palace now
And fit the party frock
On Pentheus – the dress he'll wear
For his denouement. I will stage
A gorgeous end for him.

56

Overall, Greig's *Bacchae* is crammed with puns, jokes and sound effects; and with an overabundance of religious, sexual and theatrical imagery brought to Greek tragedy by the Scream.

Stage directions for 'THE FOURTH STASIMON' indicate that the Bacchae 'sing into being the murder of Pentheus' (63). As in the source text, however, Pentheus' death is ultimately narrated by a reporting figure (here called a 'Messenger').⁴⁴ There is genuine pathos in this narrative, almost as though the invariant of *Bacchae* (see Glossary) has, at the last, started to resist being made fun of:

They pulled out lung and liver, heart
And gut and threw them all away.
The forest filled with women's shouts,
Their cheers and the awful cries
Of Pentheus –
Screaming
Screaming
Until the last of his breath was
Gone.

69

Dionysus' return to the stage, then, is oddly subdued. Agaue's mourning speech has ended in despair: 'See, Father, how all tomorrow's / Hopes have turned into today's black / Emptiness. / See. / Nothing.' Dionysus enters, 'a god, in all his glory' (83). And in an invented speech, he becomes a spectator of the very tragedy he has orchestrated:

This scene is hard to watch. This grief.
It brings no joy to me to see

A mother weeping for her boy.
 A grandfather destroyed. A house –
 A great city – spoiled for ever.
 I knew the ending when I wrote
 The script, but still – to see it – here
 In front of me, played out for real,
 It's cruel.

83–4

No more tomfoolery: in plain iambic tetrameters, Dionysus describes his own emotional response to a 'cruel' tragedy 'played out for real'. In a sense, he models one possible sympathetic response to *Bacchae*. Yet his sadness rings hollow. The human characters may face 'black emptiness', but how 'hard' is it for Dionysus, 'a god, in all his glory', to witness a 'tragic', 'gorgeous' 'drag act'?

Despite Dionysus' protestations to the contrary, Pentheus' death in Greig's *Bacchae* is not cruel, hard to watch or tragic. Rather, it is more or less comic and not a little perplexing. Onstage, Cumming's Dionysus was not scary or threatening. He was a local hero; audience-members in Scotland would even call out to him and cheer.⁴⁵ During one matinée, when Agaue recognized Pentheus' head in her hands and screamed, some audience-members laughed. Some even thought Greig himself had invented the ending.⁴⁶ Representations – and erasures – of Pentheus' death are central to the play and its reception (Chapter 2); overloading *Bacchae* risks overloading *sparagmos*. And it would seem that Greig's gag-filled, hypersemiotic script had already made a joke of everything and everyone to such an extent that a shift in tone from flippant to sombre was too much for some.

That light-hearted tone was maintained by John Tiffany's all-singing, all-dancing chorus, whose show-tune odes reimaged *Bacchae* as a cabaret. Instead of Dionysian tambourines and pipes, these chorus-members used another notionally 'foreign' musical idiom, namely gospel- and R&B-inflected show tunes. There are of course precedents for reinventing Greek tragedy as a popular-music oratorio, the most famous being *The Gospel at Colonus* (1983), an acclaimed African-American gospel adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* featuring The Blind Boys of Alabama. But this was different. Extrapolating from musical idiom and costume, critics have routinely described Tiffany's chorus-members as 'American'.⁴⁷ In fact, they were black

British actresses. White performers played the main Greek characters. Tiffany's production therefore foreignized the chorus of Bacchae (and the black actresses who sang and danced in it) vis-à-vis race *and* culture, repackaging them as African-American backup singers tacked on as an exotic addendum to a Scottish play. Peter Meineck, in a review of the performance, observed:

Where this production seriously misfired was in the choices made for the chorus. Ten women clad in red ball gowns sang turgid, derivative, '70s-sounding show tunes that did nothing but distract from the fluidity of the piece as a whole. Very bad choreography and the worst approximation of African dance I have ever seen made for embarrassing choral interludes. Making the chorus 'ethnic' [i.e. black] seemed a strange and patronizing choice, probably fuelled by the good intentions to give a touch of 'World' to the music. It really didn't work.⁴⁸

Two final examples shed further light on Greig's translation: *The Bacchae: a Tragedy in One Act* (2004) by Kneehigh Theatre (Chapter 2) and Greig's earlier Greek play *Oedipus the Visionary* (2005). The Kneehigh Theatre *Bacchae* is a roughly contemporary modernizing adaptation which traverses similar textual ground as Greig's *Bacchae*. The chorus uses popular-song forms: 'We are The Bacchae / We are his women / So wild with desire // We are The Bacchae / We are his wives / And we burn in his fire.'⁴⁹ Language is idiomatic and colloquial. 'I tell you, I've worshipped some Gods in my time / But this one is the best for grandmothers! // So bugger knitting! Sod cakes! And up the arse of toothless food!'⁵⁰ There are rhymes and jokes. Tiresias: 'Forget creaking bones, and that our grey skin sags!' Cadmus: 'Who cares if I wear a colostomy bag!'⁵¹ There is metatheatricality. 'For those of you who do not know us,' Dionysus says (echoing Mahon's translation), 'I am a god and this is my chorus.'⁵² The Coryphaeus (literally, 'leader' of the chorus) introduces himself like so: 'My name is Coryphaeus / I am your chorus leader.'⁵³ There are musical interludes. There is cross-dressing.⁵⁴ Dionysus and the chorus code-switch into Hungarian. Most importantly, a stage direction indicates that Agave 'tears PENTHEUS' head off' onstage.⁵⁵ On the other hand, there is no transliteration or classicizing formalism, little theology, and scant concern with nominal authenticity. The writers' stated aim was 'to rewrite the story with a modern, entertaining and accessible voice whilst at the same time retaining the dramatic weight and meaning of each scene.'⁵⁶ All in all, the Kneehigh Theatre adaptation exemplifies

the trend for unrestrained, Dionysiac receptions of *Bacchae*; and, by way of contrast, illustrates the limitations of radical authenticity in Greig's translation.

Oedipus the Visionary adapts Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* in a modern-day, South African Thebes.⁵⁷ In the preface, Greig describes Sophocles' *Oedipus* as 'a myth and a play which form the very definition of the western mind' and explains his decision to adapt (rather than translate) in terms of authenticity:

Apart from the fact that there are many fine translations in existence already, I didn't feel artistically inspired by the idea of literary authenticity. I was far more interested in emotional authenticity. I wanted to find a world in which I could re-tell Sophocles' story so that it would feel to a modern audience just as shocking, violent and nihilistic as if it were one of the so called 'In Yer Face' plays which were dominating the British theatre at that time [in 1998]. I didn't want the audience to watch with their fingers stroking their chins, pondering the fineness of the poetry.⁵⁸

'Literary' and 'emotional authenticity' are simply other names for nominal and expressive authenticity. Literary (nominal) authenticity, which does not interest Greig, is the domain of translation. Emotional (expressive) authenticity, which does, is the domain of adaptation: only adaptation can achieve 'In Yer Face' pathos.

For example:

MAN 1:

Someone tell me.

How can the same cunt,

the same deep wet cunt

have room for the father and room for the son?

Home cunt, safe cunt.

...

Husband, father and son all together? No.

How could cunt not dry up?

Sew itself shut.⁵⁹

This passage clearly echoes 'Mike's Cunt Speech': an infamous sequence from Steven Berkoff's play *East* (1972), an early harbinger of In-Yer-Face theatre, which pummels audiences with the taboo word *cunt*.⁶⁰ Sarah Kane, In-Yer-Face playwright extraordinaire, was another important influence on Greig; he wrote the introduction to her *Complete Plays*.⁶¹ And what is more, both

Berkoff and Kane adapted ancient tragedies with a focus on violence: Berkoff, using verbal violence, in *Greek* (1980) and *Oedipus* (published 2000; première 2011); and Kane, using onstage physical violence, in *Phaedra's Love* (1996).⁶²

Greig is not an In-Yer-Face playwright.⁶³ But *Oedipus the Visionary* is still a punchy adaptation which seeks expressive (emotional) authenticity through realism, pathos, and verbal violence. His *Oedipus* says:

SHOW ME TO MY PEOPLE.
EXPOSE ME.
FATHER KILLER.
MOTHER FUCKER.
PLAGUE MAKER.
MAKE THEM SPIT.
MAKE THEM PISS IN MY WOUNDS.⁶⁴

In contrast, Greig's Dionysus is gentle and not at all terrible. As a theatrical performance, the Tiffany-Greig *Bacchae* was a spectacular, successful and well-received cabaret performance of a classic play. For all its radical aspirations, this was not really a radical production, let alone an In-Yer-Face one. In Meineck's words, again:

It was in ... [the] moments of sardonic wit that the production was at its most engaging and entertaining. But I couldn't escape the feeling that this was 'Euripides lite.' The show dazzled with naked derrières and flaming stages but felt devoid of any real emotional depth or passion.⁶⁵

The *skopos* of radical authenticity; the influence of a literal scholarly translation; and the stated and unstated expectations of the NTS, the Edinburgh Festival, the implied audience and so on left *Bacchae* to fall between the two stools of tasteful updating and total reinvention. Greig's text is great fun: a creative, 'visible' version which illustrates the wide-ranging applicability of Euripides' play, the paradoxical nature of radical authenticity and the persistent influence of 'Dionysus' and 'the Dionysiac' on the play's reception. Like Theocritus, Nonnus and many others, Greig sympathizes with the Scream. Metaphorically speaking, the Scream ought to imply a metaphysics of horror, eros, ecstasy, rage, pain and so on. Yet despite the radical posture inscribed in the translation and embodied in Cumming's stage persona, Greig locates the Dionysiac in neoliberal bourgeois hedonism. In Choul's analysis, hypersemiosis

is closely related to ‘meaninglessness or hyposemiosis [lit. ‘not enough signification’], where insufficient correlations make it difficult to assign a satisfactory reading.’⁶⁶ In Greig’s hypersemiotic *Bacchae*, likewise, the whole is indeed somewhat less than the sum of its parts: radical authenticity and the many faces of ‘Dionysus’ (i.e. the Scream) produce an over-determined text which is thoughtful, witty and at the same time curiously lacking in emotional heft. Ours is not to reason why. ‘Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen ... Intellect must always submit / To the power of the Scream’ (19).

Epilogue

Robin Robertson, *Euripides: Bacchae* (2014)

Anne Carson, *Euripides: Bakkhai* (2015)

‘Conclusions’ imply finality; ‘epilogue’ implies afterthoughts. Both are on offer in these last pages, beginning with afterthoughts on two recent *Bacchae* translations, one by prize-winning Scottish poet Robin Robertson (2014) and one by acclaimed Canadian poet and classicist Anne Carson (2015).¹

Robertson names his *skopos* outright: ‘to provide a text that can be read – and acted – easily: an English version that is as true to the Greek of two and a half thousand years ago as it is to the way English is spoken now.’² In other words: a nominally authentic, accurate, fluent *Bacchae* which sounds English but looks Greek-ish. To that end, a glossary with pronunciation guide aids fluent reading of Greek words (in Latin spellings).³ The poet is also coy about his source language: English or Greek? The ‘primary source’ is David Kovacs’s bilingual edition. The line numbers match those of the Greek text. Robertson ‘consulted a number of fine English translations’; he borrows phrases directly from Kovacs’s Loeb edition.⁴ Despite criticizing ‘more academic’ translations, he chooses (‘rather than introduce speculative connective tissue’) to leave the two lacunae unfilled, marked with brackets and asterisks and explained by footnotes, just as in a scholarly edition.⁵ At a text-organizational level, broad gestures at nominal authenticity make Robertson’s *Bacchae*, paradoxically, seem ‘more academic’ than others.

There are few obvious misfires. (Dionysus, god of wine, is ‘the Evian god’.⁶ Pentheus asks, ‘What is your message, messenger?’) But there are also few memorable lines. (One example, from the first reporting figure: ‘And then the women ran, and the world ran with them.’⁷) The language does uncurl to good

effect in the longer narratives, as prose rhythms and syntax better display Robertson's (and Euripides') feeling for a good story:

And then the stranger worked a miracle.
He reached for the highest branch of the great fir and,
slowly, pulled it down,
down, down to the black earth
till it was curved taut as a bow

...

He sat Pentheus there at the top of the tree
then let the trunk pass through his hands, slow,
slow, slow, so as not to throw the wobbling king.

...

and from his high roost Pentheus fell,
down, down, down, crashing head first
through the branches to the ground,
screaming now as he understood his fate.⁸

Robertson is at heart a lyric poet, and his *Bacchae* is most assured when ventriloquizing Euripides as though he were a lyric poet writing in English – notably in the two passages where Euripides' chorus compares a maenad to a wild animal. For example:

She runs like a gale runs over the plain
near the river, each bound
and plunge like a gust of joy, taking her
dancing, deep through the forest
where no one can find her, and the dark
is free and its heart is the darkest green.⁹

This is muscular, fluid verse. More often than not, however, Robertson puts fluency ahead of language, rhythm and music. As fellow translator Sarah Ruden wrote in *The New Criterion*:

Song, dance, verse dialogue: tragedy is inescapably about music, a set of intricate rhythms ... [T]ragedy's movement is in strong, functional beats.

Robertson's use of free verse to render the *Bacchae* is especially unfortunate. Crucial action in the play is rhythmic: Dionysus's celebrants, the Bacchantes, are described as running and dancing, and the original chorus must have literally run and danced, with vigor.¹⁰

Although it seems premature to insist that *Bacchae* can never be translated satisfactorily in free verse, it is true that Robertson's translation never really insists on being read aloud, let alone danced, sung or chanted. More importantly, no particular agenda is legible beyond the stated aim: fluent transmission of semantic content. Robertson's *Bacchae* is much like any number of readable, actable, sensible translations – and we need readable, actable, sensible translations as well as singable, danceable, risky ones. It confirms that even *Bacchae* does not *always* elicit transformative (Dionysiac) translations or radical interpretations, and that translation history is far from linear. As we will now see, another free-verse *Bacchae* went in a wildly different direction the very next year.

In the borderlands between poetry, translation and classics, Anne Carson is a law unto herself. She has translated Sappho's fragments (*If Not, Winter*; 2002) and plays by Aeschylus (one), Sophocles (two) and Euripides (seven); used Greek literature, especially Sappho, to rethink desire in *Eros the Bittersweet* (1986); written two verse-novels about the mythical figure Geryon; and even adapted Sophocles' *Antigone* as *Antigonick* (2012), a playscript illustrated in the style of a graphic novel. Her most recent classical works, each for a high-profile London production with a screen actor in the starring role, were *Antigone* (2015) and *Bacchae* (2015).

The Almeida Theatre commissioned Carson's *Bacchae* (spelled 'Bakkhai') for its Almeida Greeks festival; the published text refers to a 'version' and an 'adaptation'.¹¹ In lieu of the expected translator's note, Carson includes a new poem: 'I Wish I Were Two Dogs Then I Could Play with Me (Translator's Note on Euripides' *Bakkhai*)' (5–8).¹² In a learned, authoritative voice, the speaker of this poem discusses Dionysus and *Bacchae* at some length, ranging across such themes as time, beginnings, change, violence and desire.

In effect, 'I Wish I Were Two Dogs' outlines an *a priori* theory of Euripides' Dionysus. He is 'god / of the beginning / before the beginning' (5). He is a young god. He is also marked by 'previousness'; time is 'a fiction for him' (7). He is foreign. He is Greek. He helps us. He hurts us. 'Then the posse arrives // and violence begins. / What does this tell us? / The shock of the new // will prepare its own unveiling / in old and brutal ways' (7–8). Most of all, he pricks subconscious desires into action, into *performance*:

He is
Pleased
if he can cause you to perform

...

the desire
before the desire,
the lick of beginning to know you don't know.
If life is a stage,
that is the show.
Exit Dionysos.

8

'I Wish I Were Two Dogs Then I Could Play with Me (Translator's Note on Euripides' *Bakkhai*)' may be the best poem about Dionysus in English. (With apologies to Ezra Pound.) Its view of the god, though not necessarily historical or persuasive, is coherent. It makes sense of *Bacchae* as a play about the whole of life, *stage* and *show*. But it is still effectively a poem about modern conceptions of 'Dionysus'. What does it mean to say that the Greek god (*theos*) of wine, theatre, ritual madness and mystery cult is also 'god of the beginning before the beginning'?

As if in answer to that very question, the translation proper fleshes out Carson's old-and-new god with an invented, programmatic passage. Dionysus says:

I am something supernatural –
not exactly god, ghost, spirit, angel, principle, or element –
There is no term for it in English.
In Greek they say *daimon* –
can we just use that?

13

Dionysus is being overly clever; he is a god. In fifth-century tragedy, *daimōn* (δαίμων) typically refers to one of three reasonably well-defined phenomena: good or bad fortune, the gods in general or a particular deity. It is a common synonym for *theos*.¹³ The related adjective *daimonios* ('to do with a *daimōn*') is a synonym for *theios* ('divine, of the gods'). Only later did *daimōn* or *daimonion* explicitly refer to a 'spirit' or 'daemon' as opposed to a full-blown god (e.g. Pl.

Ap. 27b–27e, *Symp.* 202d). Carson's Dionysus uses the word '*daimon*' anachronistically and disingenuously to defer conventional divinity and assume an air of mystery.

Not that he has lost his sense of godhood: 'But I *am* a god. I'll show him. Him and all his Thebans' (14). There is a point to his cleverness after all:

So they will learn,
so Thebes must learn,
to call me son of Zeus
and call me
daimon.

14

The word '*daimon*' has become a convenient term for the old–new Dionysus described in 'I Wish I Were Two Dogs', a god who holds Olympian status yet remains somehow different from other Olympian *theoi*, 'not exactly god, ghost, spirit, angel, principle, or element'. Throughout the translation, then, Carson uniquely renders the words *daimōn* (δαίμων) and *daimonios* (δαίμόνιος), which frequently occur in the source text, as '*daimon*' and '*daimonic*'.¹⁴ Translated and italicized thus, '*daimon*' and '*daimonic*' are foreignizing elements; via the English cognates 'demon' and 'demonic', and with a fuzzy and anachronistic definition of *daimōn* established, these words imbue Carson's *Bacchae* with a metaphysical sensibility that goes beyond mere godhood.

Across poems, translations and essays, Carson's writing smoulders with desire: eros, Eros and (in Greek) *erōs*. As Plato's Socrates tells it, Eros is neither god nor human (*Symp.* 202d13). He is something in between: 'a great *daimōn*' (δαίμων μέγας). He inspires us to seek beauty, to make beautiful things and to contemplate the Good. Yet we can only desire what we do not have. In *Eros the Bittersweet*, Carson writes, 'Desire for an object *that he* [the lover] *never knew he lacked* is defined, by a shift of distance, as desire for a necessary part of himself.'¹⁵ And she, too, treats Eros as a creative – generative – impulse analogous to the desire for knowledge.¹⁶

Carson's Dionysus is a δαίμων μέγας. He inspires desire, not just for sex (in Greek: *ta Aphrodisia*, 'stuff to do with Aphrodite'), though that is part of it, but 'the desire / before the desire, / the lick of beginning to know you don't know'. In 'I Wish I Were Two Dogs', he inspires us to 'perform' our subconscious

desires and reach out for the things we do not even know we lack. Only then, as Carson's chorus tells it:

Dionysos will fill your soul with peace.
 It's not about intellectual prowess,
 it's not about true and false,
 it's pure release.
 It's your life
 night and day
 free of grief:
 Dionysos' gift.

26

Like Eros, therefore, Dionysus is a *daimōn* who gives 'pure release' and a life 'free from grief' by recovering submerged desires.

One telling use of '*daimon*' does not correspond to an occurrence in the Greek. At the end of his first, angry, speech in Euripides' *Bacchae*, Pentheus says: 'When women / have wine at festivals, / I tell you, there's nothing healthy about their rituals' (*Bacch.* 260–2). Or, as Carson renders it: 'Women and wine – toxic combination! / *Daimonic* my foot!' (21). On the face of it, Pentheus is talking about maenadism, but one could read his comment, metapoetically, as an imagined sceptical reaction to the translation as a whole. He fails to realize that Dionysus' cult is in fact '*daimonic*'. We, too, would be mistaken not to recognize how seriously Carson's *Bacchae* takes the idea of the '*daimonic*'.

According to the speaker of 'I Wish I Were Two Dogs', 'beginnings' have a colour: 'Greenish-bluish-purple ... almost transparent, // as a ripe grape' (5). What colour, then, is Dionysus? He presides over grapevines. Some grapes are green; others are 'greenish-bluish-purple'. Accordingly, Carson splashes colour (mostly green but also blue and purple) throughout her translation. For example: 'the clustering grace of the vine ... the glowing green delirium of the vine ... the joyous blue blush of the vine' (32). Green is the colour of nature in its vegetative, regenerative aspect. Green means photosynthesis, water, growth, food, *life*. Like Walter Pater and E. R. Dodds, Carson treats Dionysus as a god of verdant nature and liquid vitality; Tiresias speaks of 'the wet element' (22). But green is also a colour for outlaws: Robin Hood, the Green Knight, Jack in the Green, the Riddler, the Hulk, Martians, eco-terrorists, leprechauns and so

on. ‘The shock of the new // will prepare its own unveiling / in old and brutal ways.’

The most common Greek words for green are χλόη (*khloē*: green growth, foliage, grass), χλοερός (*khloeros*) or χλοήρης (*khloērēs*: bright green, fresh, verdant) and χλωρός (*khlōros*: bright green, pale green, yellowish green, pale).¹⁷ But there is more to these colour terms than meets the eye, especially χλωρός (*khlōros*). Much of the time in Greek literature, χλωρός unambiguously indicates a physical colour, typically on the spectrum between yellow and green. The Homeric poems, however, mostly reserve it for describing either people who are afraid or fear itself, as in the recurring phrase χλωρόν δέος (*khlōron deos*, ‘pale fear’). Other poets use χλωρός to describe liquids: blood, wine, dew or tears, especially tears which are fresh (i.e. still wet).¹⁸ It could be used as a synonym for ‘living’ (Aesch. Ag. 677). Some scholars even claim that ‘moist’ is the original, essential meaning of the word.¹⁹

Sappho is a major figure in Carson’s writing (not least in *Eros the Bittersweet* and *If Not, Winter*); fragment 31, one of the most celebrated love poems of all time, features a startling use of this Greek word χλωρός (moist-pale-yellow-green). Throughout Sappho 31, desire induces a sequence of psychosomatic responses in the speaker: quickened pulse; inability to speak; raised body temperature; loss of vision; thundering in the ears; cold sweat; shaking. The final symptom concerns skin colour: the speaker turns ‘paler than grass’ (*khlōrotera ... poias*, 31.14). Or, perhaps: *greener than grass*, or even *more moist than grass*.²⁰ According to the ancient treatise in which this poem is preserved, Sappho’s speaker is afraid ([Longinus], *Subl.* 10.3). A yet more nuanced interpretation might be that the speaker’s desire, which is very real indeed, induces a fear-like psychosomatic response. Desire, like fear, turns us clammy, pale and yellow-green.

Euripides’ text, too, has its splashes of colour:

I covered it all over in grape-vine leaves (χλόη).

Bacch. 12

They’re sitting out in the open, on rocks, under green (χλωρός) fir-trees.

Bacch. 38

Thebes! ... Bloom! Bloom with evergreen (χλοήρης) smilax!

Bacch. 105–8

... cattle feeding on green grass (χλόη)

Bacch. 735

... like a fawn playing in the meadow's green (χλοερός) pleasures

Bacch. 866–7

This last phrase is especially charged, in Greek as in English. (Robin Robertson's *Bacchae* rises to the occasion at precisely this point.) With Pentheus' death imminent, dramatic tension heightens lyric intensity; the Bacchae, now with the stage to themselves, use metaphor to describe a life lived for Dionysus.²¹ The imagery is evocative and distinctive. Dancing for Dionysus makes one feel like a fawn, escaping hunters and running off to play in the grass. The Greek sparkles. "Green joy", a colour-word applied to an abstract noun, is bold for a Greek poet.²² Hypallage (epithet transfer) adds its own spark. (Strictly speaking, the *meadow* is *green*, but if there were such a thing as green joy, what would it feel like?) Carson captures the excitement:

like a fawn
skylarking
in the
green joy of the meadow –
she runs
free
from the hunt and the hunter

46

More than that, she uses green as a synecdoche for the 'daimonic'. In Dionysus' words:

I myself
planted it [Semele's tomb] all round with vines
in the clear key of green.

13

and they sit beneath pine trees
staring at their own green hands

14

The 'daimonic' causes synaesthesia: like the composer Messiaen, Dionysus can hear colours as musical keys; green is a 'clear' key. But the 'daimonic' also

causes body horror. These women might well have the green thumbs of keen gardeners, but there is something disturbing about them ‘staring at their own green hands.’

In *Bacchae*, Euripides’ chorus calls on Thebes to ‘bloom with evergreen (*khloērēs*) smilax’ in four short lines (*Bacch.* 105–8). At the same moment in Carson’s translation, more than thirty varieties of green burst forth, one after the other, in a twenty-five-line tour de force:

O Thebes! garland yourself
 in all the green there is –
 ivy green,
 olive green,
 fennel green,
 ...
 green of the green fuse,
 green of the honeyed muse
 ...
 green of jealous joy,
 green of the secret holy violence of the thyrsos,
 green of the sacred iridescence of the dance

16–17

It is an electric sequence. Green is a colour of plants; of natural growth; of water; and of art, ritual and play. That is not all: Carson borrows from Soyinka the notion of Dionysus as ‘the gentle, jealous joy’.²³ Green has become the colour of jealousy, of *sparagmos*, of the *thursos*, of the chorus and, above all, of the ‘*daimonic*’.

A classical scholar and translator, especially one with an abiding interest in Sappho and translation, almost certainly knows of the scholarly conversation around the word *χλωρός* and its resonances – greenness, verdure, pallor, moisture. (Indeed, the phrase *khlērotera ... poias* from Sappho 31 is rendered ‘greener than grass’ in *If Not, Winter*.²⁴) In effect, Carson’s *Bacchae* reanimates that conversation only to exhaust the already broad semantic range of Greek colour terms in a burst of *daimonic* green. By way of comparison, Carson’s translation of *Antigone* (2015) applies the same thesaurus-assisted approach to *δεινός* (*deinos*), a problematic Greek word with several meanings: terrible, awful, amazing, wonderful and so on. One of the most famous uses of *δεινός*

comes at the beginning of the 'Ode to Man' from *Antigone*: 'There are many amazing things (*deina*) but nothing more amazing than humankind' (Soph. *Ant.* 332–3). Or, as Carson's chorus puts it: 'many things strange / terrible / clever / wondrous / marvellous / dreadful / awful / and / weird'.²⁵ The 'amplified' method, well established in biblical translation, implies a wish to say more than translation proper will allow. This, too, is the principle operating in the expanded definition of *daimōn* and in the thirty-something varieties of green which sprout in Carson's *Bacchae*.

The colour green (or purplish-bluish grape-green) exemplifies Dionysus' inherently '*daimonic*' nature. Synaesthesia amplifies the erotic charge, and Carson paints 'green joy' as a natural outworking of the '*daimonic*', a kind of genetic, evolutionary desire which is itself a feeling that we can love:

Who
does
not
love
this
feeling?

46

Ultimately, Dionysus' greatest blessing is enervating, insatiable, '*daimonic*' desire.

I dream of a perfectly clear afternoon
on the island where Aphrodite sits
counting her blessings
beside the erotic sea.

...

Take me there, Dionysos!
O *daimon*!
O Bakkhos!
Take me
somewhere ruled by the law of desire
where we can dance you and dance you and never tire.

26

Dionysus himself resists translation: 'There is no term for it in English' (13). One solution is simply to rattle off his many names: he is 'the god we call /

Bakkhos, / Twiceborn, / Dithyrambos, / Bromios, / Euios, / Dionysos!’ (32). Another solution is to modernize him, in psychological terms, as the ‘gladness of grapes and wine / so beneficial to body, soul, and psyche’s / interior design’ (25). Yet another solution is to rethink the idea of translation itself. Specifically, the word ‘translated’ is twice used in its obsolete sense: Zeus ‘translated’ Dionysus from fire (32); Ares will ‘translate’ his daughter Harmonia and her husband Cadmus to the Islands of the Blessed (69). This is the poetry of translation in reverse: a pre-existing translation metaphor (in this case, the root meaning ‘carry across’) is written, in a concrete sense, into a target text. By extension, therefore, translation – saying the same thing in another language – has become a divinely ordained ‘carrying across’, like a god rescuing his child from oblivion. It is in this sense that Carson’s *Bacchae* translates the ‘*daimonic*’.

Carson is a classical scholar. Her Dionysus ponders aloud the precise English word for *daimōn*. And he aims, in an expansive invented phrase, ‘to make myself known: / my rituals, my dances, my religion, my livewire self!’ (13). ‘I came to thrill you, Thebes,’ he says. ‘Don’t doubt I will’ (14). Carson’s translation likewise privileges expressive authenticity: saying something true, meaningful and relevant about the ‘livewire’ workings of the ‘*daimonic*’. Despite cosmetic likenesses, this *Bacchae* is quite unlike David Greig’s hypersemiotic Hymn to the Scream. Where Greig brings numerous different phenomena under the umbrella of the Dionysiac, Carson sustains a discrete, at times almost sceptical reading focused on a central philosophical concept: the ‘*daimonic*’.

Above all, Carson’s *Bacchae* translates Dionysus and the ‘*daimonic*’ from the academy to the real world. Experienced synaesthetically, Dionysus is green: the colour, and the musical key, of nature, transgression and desire. But for Carson, as we have also seen, erotic or intellectual desire – wanting to have someone or wanting to know something – tastes bittersweet. There is always a gap between wanting and having. In turn, her *Bacchae* suggests that desire itself can be an object of desire in a potentially infinite regression of ‘the desire before the desire’: ‘Who / does / not / love / this / feeling?’ (46). Dionysus and the ‘*daimonic*’ are supremely present but at the same time just out of reach.

Nor does Carson’s *Bacchae* take a straightforward view of translation. Zeus ‘translates’ Dionysus; Ares ‘translates’ Harmonia and Cadmus. To translate in the obsolete sense, as God ‘translatid’ Enok, is to do something concrete and physical but also abstract and supernatural, such that translation seems both

humanly possible and impossible. In Billings's view, classical reception itself (which includes translation) is an 'erotic' phenomenon; receiving a lost past in the distant present involves scarcity and plenty, proximity and distance, wanting and never quite having.²⁶ In this light, the '*daimonic*' is a suitable metaphor for classical reception: a complex interplay of present and past, self and other, pleasure and pain, conscious and subconscious. Carson's *Bacchae* can thus be read both as a 'livewire' play about the death of Pentheus and as a deep, '*daimonic*' meditation on classics, reception and translation.

Conclusions

Like its protagonist, *Bacchae* is chameleonic. It is a play about the death of Pentheus; it is *the* depiction of Dionysus. It is arcane, archaic, modern, postmodern and more. Scholars argue over it; writers, filmmakers, directors and composers flock to it. In English translation alone, as the examples in this book demonstrate, *Bacchae* traverses humanism, Modernism, mysticism, anti-sectarianism, world peace, psycho-sexual liberation, subconscious desire and much else besides. And yet, the play's reception is still at its most fine-grained in translation. Translations are the closest most readers get to a play composed in ancient Greek. More to the point, poem-translations reproduce *Bacchae* in ways that adaptations, summaries, lectures, commentaries, monographs and so on do not.

James S. Holmes sets out a useful way of thinking about translation, in which textual responses to a poem range between poetry and interpretation:

Poem inspired by poem	POETRY
Poem 'about' poem	
Imitation	
Verse translation (<i>metapoem</i>)	
Prose translation	
Critical essay in another language	
Critical essay in language of poem	INTERPRETATION ¹

Each of the translations discussed in the main chapters of this book is, ostensibly, a verse translation or *metapoem*. And in Holmes's model, a verse translation – what Reynolds calls a 'poem-translation' – is a special kind of intertextual composition poised between poetry and interpretation. Bassnett observes: 'The verse translation rests on the axis point where types of interpretation intersect with types of imitation and derivation.'² Verse translation is a useful filter on the reception of *Bacchae*.

Even so, I have applied a further filter. As Walter Benjamin puts it, 'Translations that are more than transmissions of subject matter come into

being when in the course of its survival a work has reached the age of its fame.³ And given that *Bacchae* has now reached 'the age of its fame', I have selected a group of semiotically rich, 'visible' translations which do more than merely transmit ('send across') the play's subject matter. As it happens, my examples do have extrinsic target-culture significance, whether because the author is a well-known poet (H.D., Derek Mahon, Anne Carson) or playwright (Colin Teevan, David Greig), or because the translation itself is historically noteworthy (Gilbert Murray). I have nevertheless passed over many well-read translations. In practical terms, readily available titles in series like Penguin Classics, Oxford World's Classics or the Loeb Classical Library, not to mention out-of-copyright translations available free online, are central to the ongoing transmission of classical texts. But *The Gentle, Jealous God* is ultimately concerned less with how popular translations are than with what they have to say and the manner in which they say it. Creative translations which aspire to say something urgent and substantive to, with and about *Bacchae*, Dionysus and 'Dionysus' are as vital to the play's afterlife as conventionally literal, accurate, fluent translations. In *Likenesses*, Reynolds writes:

What is most impressive about the [Ciaran] Carson version [of Dante's *Inferno*] is its readiness to embark on this kind of searching departure from its source ... Connecting with a writer is sometimes less important than realising that you have failed to connect: it is for this reason that infidelity, in a translator, can be a virtue.⁴

'Searching departure' is a compelling metaphor and an attractive idea. *Bacchae* needs risky, unfaithful translations as well as dependable, faithful ones. And indeed, the translations of *Bacchae* discussed in this book do as a whole make the kinds of searching departure from their source text which take readers somewhere new and interesting even as they fail to connect with Euripides.

In one such searching departure, the reception of *Bacchae* reveals a Celtic strain. E. R. Dodds was born in pre-partition Northern Ireland. George Bernard Shaw (Ireland) adapted *Bacchae* in *Major Barbara*; Conall Morrison (Ireland), in *The Bacchae of Baghdad*. Brian Friel (Ireland) echoed it in *Dancing at Lughnasa*. In *Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party*, James K. Baxter (New Zealand) made Dionysus an Irish dancer. Derek Mahon (Ireland), Colin Teevan (Ireland), David Greig (Scotland) and Robin Robertson (Scotland) have all

translated *Bacchae*. Classical reception has played a significant part in Celtic theatre traditions more generally.⁵ And there are any number of hypothetical reasons why Irish, Scottish and Welsh writers might feel an affinity with *Bacchae* in particular: fiery temperament; serious interest in religion, identity and cultural conflict; violence; black humour; irony; fatalism; alcohol; and the revolutionary figure of Dionysus. I have already mentioned Marianne McDonald (Chapter 5), but her claim about *Bacchae* in Ireland bears quoting in full here:

Derek Mahon's *Bacchae: After Euripides* is also a parable suitable for Ireland. Dionysus can be regarded as a force of nature, the force of a people who are fighting to reclaim their rights – a people who are laying claim to a land that has been taken from them.⁶

To reiterate: Mahon's *Bacchae* is not a parable. It is a translation. Dionysus is not a force of nature.⁷ He is a sentient, occasionally anthropomorphic, immortal, practically omnipotent being (i.e. a god). Yet if one so wishes, one can reimagine *Bacchae* into a parable such that Dionysus takes almost any position imaginable, on almost any subject, including Irish independence.

Other Greek deities have multiple epithets and interests, sometimes apparently contradictory ones. (Artemis, a virgin goddess, presides over childbirth.) But Dionysus is large; he contains multitudes. And in terms of literary tradition, it was *Bacchae* that established him in this singular position. According to Henk Versnel, 'If Dionysos was different it is in that particular identity of his that is pictured in the *Bacchae* and which thus distinguishes him from all other gods.'⁸ What is more, religion in *Bacchae* is basically 'henotheistic'; in a polytheistic system, henotheism is 'the privileged devotion to one god, who is regarded as uniquely superior while other gods are neither depreciated nor rejected and continue receiving due cultic observance whenever this is ritually required.'⁹ In turn, modern thinking about Dionysus leans heavily on henotheism. For example: 'No other god as effectively embraced the realities of human living and dying. From the days of classical Athens down to the end of the ancient world, no god was more worshipped, more feared and more loved.'¹⁰ Or: 'Our god is the best god ... He is the Scream.'¹¹

In a further development of henotheistic thinking, the all-encompassing influence of 'Dionysus' renders *Bacchae* more amenable to abstraction and

analogy than any other Greek tragedy.¹² Most people would probably agree, for example, that the tragedy *Rhesus* is basically about Rhesus' death.¹³ Euripides' *Children of Heracles*, by contrast, has long been known as a 'political play'. Euripides' *Medea* is typically read with reference to gender, feminism, motherhood, women's suffrage and so on.¹⁴ (Will anyone ever produce a *Medea* about, say, football hooliganism or global warming?) To many readers, *Hippolytus* is about 'Aphrodite' in much the same way that *Bacchae* is about 'Dionysus'. 'Aphrodite', as a cosmic erotic principle, represents sex, the libido, desire and so on. But 'Dionysus' already encompasses all of this and more. In Carson's *Bacchae*, it is Dionysus who is 'the desire before the desire'; Dionysus who is χλωρός; and Dionysus who the chorus-members hope will take them to Cyprus, where Aphrodite sits 'counting her blessings / beside the erotic sea' (26).

Euripides' *Bacchae* is no longer only about Thebes, Dionysus and 'the death of Pentheus and its circumstances'.¹⁵ It is also about 'Dionysus' defeating 'Apollo' and all the rational, conservative, masculinist values he represents. Malcolm Heath may well be right that this kind of 'intellectualizing' reading was not what Greek dramatists primarily had in mind (see p. 17). It is, however, one way many people think about Greek tragedy. Thanks in large part to Nietzsche, it is certainly the way most people think about Dionysus and *Bacchae*. According to Edith Hall, *Bacchae* is popular partly because (as is appropriate for a play about Dionysus) it refuses to submit to a single reading.¹⁶ But *Bacchae* is also popular because it *does* submit to many different readings. Over the last century, this play has been so overloaded with signification, so overdetermined as a master-text informing the whole spectrum of human experience, that little else could conceivably be squeezed into it.

What about the poetry of translation? *Bacchae* suggests various Dionysian metaphors for translation: not only 'rapt fondling' but also *sparagmos*, second birth, apotheosis, masking, mysteries, maenadism and so on. More to the point, whether or not one cares for the 'poetry of translation' or 'searching departures', it is clear that Dionysus is central to *Bacchae*; and that modern ideas about Dionysus, most especially the Dionysiac–Apolline opposition, are central to the play's English-language reception. Translations which present *Bacchae* – faithfully, accurately, literally – as a tragedy about the death of Pentheus (and nothing more) effectively bypass 'Dionysus', Nietzsche and the chains of reception which animate the play's afterlife. On the other hand, translations which present *Bacchae*

as a tragedy about 'Dionysus' – by way of henotheism, intellectualizing abstractions, hypersemiosis and so on – paradoxically obscure both the Athenian Dionysus and the play itself. Even in translation, *Bacchae* invites its own erasure. Hence, a paradox threaded through this book: the most 'Dionysiac' translations are often those least in touch with Dionysus and with *Bacchae*.

Dionysus is a god of identity transformation.¹⁷ Understood as a philosophical-aesthetic metaphor, he inhabits margins, permeates boundaries and collapses binary distinctions.¹⁸ Is it too fanciful, then, to see him as a god of translation, adaptation and other modes of textual transformation? In Athens, Dionysus was a civic, democratic deity. As a god of rewriting, he could perhaps challenge received ideas about textual authority and inspire better and more democratic ways of thinking about language and power. In that spirit, reading *Bacchae* in English illuminates an important but rarely questioned aspect of its reception: classic status. Classics, whether 'classical' or otherwise, are defined by their place in a canon. Canons are not magical or natural; we make them. As Venuti puts it, using the word *classic* is 'an evaluative decision ... [which is] not only influenced by, but influences, the cultural and social sites where it is made'; there are even canons of classic translations.¹⁹ Translation and the idea of a classic are looped: classics are translated; translated texts sound like classics.²⁰ Indeed, this is literally the case with the Oxford World's Classics or Penguin Classics series.

According to Frank Kermode, one thing that allows cultural productions to become 'classic' in the first place is their openness to new interpretations.²¹ And no other ancient Greek play has lived a more varied life in English than *Bacchae*. It remains a theatrical touchstone not just because critics agree that it should but also because it accommodates different viewpoints. Rewritings maintain its canonical status just as cover versions ensure that classic popular songs remain both classic and popular. Jacques Derrida thinks about this in terms of 'iterability': the capacity to be restated and take on new meanings. He uses translation, specifically, to illustrate the stronger claim that all meaningful language is marked by iterability.²² According to Benjamin, classic texts are pre-eminently translatable: 'Translatability (*Übersetzbarkeit*) is an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifest itself in its translatability.'²³ Iterability, translatability and the idea of a classic converge in translation.

Yet there is still room for a judgement of taste. Regarding the aesthetics of translation, Martindale writes:

The aesthetic, unlike some other approaches to literature, thus has no problem with the idea of translation. A translation has another text (potentially) conjoined with it, so there is complexity for the mind to roam over. The complex and layered character of the text serves to provoke a free play of mind, involving both a direct encounter with the text we are reading and our memory of another text, in what becomes a new singular experience ('this translation is beautiful').²⁴

One of my aims in this book has been to unpack, and encourage, the kinds of 'free play of mind' that might ensue when we read Greek tragedy in English. To that end, I return to the theses with which we set out.

The weaker thesis (Rutherford): reading translations could help classicists think better.

Creative translations of *Bacchae* by poets and playwrights are often representations of the figure of 'Dionysus' as much as dramatizations of Pentheus' death. Pondering such representations of 'Dionysus' could help classicists to think more clearly about representations of Dionysus in antiquity.

The weak thesis (Martindale): receptions of ancient texts contain insights into those texts.

Modern readers and writers almost invariably approach *Bacchae* via intellectualizing abstraction. According to Heath this is an anachronistic way of thinking about Greek tragedy. But can we really be certain that none of the original spectators in the Theatre of Dionysus thought about the play along these or similar lines? The translations and adaptations in this book advance substantive claims about *Bacchae* and Dionysus which, one could argue, at least deserve *prima facie* consideration.

The strong thesis (Martindale): chains of reception, which maintain the 'readability' of ancient texts, continue to affect later receptions.

Recovering a pure, historical, pre-Nietzschean understanding of *Bacchae* is difficult, if not impossible. As Martindale pointedly observes, 'For much of antiquity one can write a reception history, or no history at all.'²⁵ *Bacchae*

remains a classic because new receptions maintain its readability, iterability and translatability. And given the accumulation of meanings and metaphors across different media, genres and cultural contexts, *Bacchae* itself, more than ever, has irrevocably become a text about 'Dionysus'. Creative translation has featured prominently in that process, not independently, but alongside and in conversation with literal translation, performance, scholarship, adaptation and all the other ways in which we encounter Greek tragedy.

Yet *Bacchae* still asks good, hard questions. From an assumed standpoint of traditional Greek piety, Euripides' play interrogates the story of Pentheus' death and the values, assumptions and potential inconsistencies encoded in that story. How did he die? Why? Was it his fault? Should we care? From one perspective, *Bacchae* is about violence; its invariant is a murder. It is a revenge tragedy with a crooked emotional trajectory, eliciting sympathy first for Dionysus (in human form) then later for the all-too mortal victim and his family.²⁶ From a different angle, *Bacchae* is about Dionysus and who he really is; its central ethical crisis revolves around religion. Are the gods real? Who is Dionysus? Should Pentheus worship him or not?²⁷

At first blush, one might well doubt that a tragedy which hinges on a theological argument could have much relevance in a secular milieu. That would be to miss the point. Dionysus is neither victim nor hero. He is a god, and gods can be cruel or kind. 'Dionysus ... a most terrifying god, most gentle to humankind' (*Bacch.* 760–1). By definition, he is never in the wrong as far as humanity is concerned. 'It was you who attacked me. I am a god' (1347). He holds authority from Zeus. 'I'm saying these things not as the son of a human father but as Dionysus, son of Zeus' (1340–1). 'My father Zeus ordained this a long time ago' (1349). And in Euripides' play, unlike so many later receptions, there is no consoling promise that things will get better. Even goodbyes fail: 'Farewell, poor girl,' Cadmus says to Agaue, 'not that you'll easily fare well' (1379–80). In dramatizing Pentheus' death and its aftermath, *Bacchae* presents a discomfiting story about human endeavour in a hostile cosmos. Segal puts it well: 'The finale leaves us with the shocked and reduced victims cowering before a punitive and vengeful god.'²⁸

There are two basic questions underlying *The Gentle, Jealous God*. What do English translations of *Bacchae* have to say? And why should we care? Generally speaking, classics, reception and the classical tradition have made significant

contributions to modernity, postmodernity and everything after. 'Dionysus' certainly crops up far more often than he ought to in histories of drama, aesthetics, the tragic and so on. *Bacchae*, too, has its place. It is the canonical literary depiction of Dionysus. It is an important text in histories of violence, theatre and religion. And it is a classic play which has been read, enjoyed and celebrated by Greeks, Romans and moderns alike. Translations of *Bacchae* can therefore reveal a great deal about how poets, dramatists and others think and write about spirituality, the supernatural, the subconscious, religion, violence, conflict, cultural identity, theatre, translation, adaptation, classical scholarship, Greek tragedy and, above all, 'Dionysus'.

In modern times, *Bacchae* has proven itself predisposed to creative translation; the examples in this book come at 'Dionysus' from a wide range of scholarly, philosophical and aesthetic angles. According to Gilbert Murray, Dionysiac cult (and by extension ancient Greek religion) can be thought of, essentially, as secular humanism in religious costume. Backed by a ritualist interpretation, his *Bacchae* calls us to follow Dionysus but also insists, along Liberal lines, that we become better people. H.D. takes Dionysiac cult, and especially maenadism, as the model for a vague kind of modern mysticism; her *Bacchae* poems seek spiritual enlightenment. Writing in a very different era, Derek Mahon sees Dionysus as a subversive, radical, anti-rationalist figure. In accordance with the comic interpretation advocated by Seidensticker and others, he reads *Bacchae* as a tragicomically dissonant play. His anti-political, parodic translation discourages us from resisting 'Dionysus' and at the same time warns us off party politics and sectarian violence. For Colin Teevan, on the other hand, Dionysus is a politically engaged Eastern god who speaks directly to a post-9/11 era. Governed by a metatheatrical reading, his activist translation advocates using theatre to address intercultural conflict. For David Greig, in turn, Dionysus is the Scream and *Bacchae* a 'hymn to the Scream'. From a position of radical authenticity, Greig's hypersemiotic *Bacchae* advocates surrendering to the Scream body, mind and soul; and thus giving way to any and every irrational or radical impulse. Anne Carson, finally, depicts Dionysus, like Eros, as a powerful, yellow-green *daimōn*. Driven by an abiding interest in the true nature of 'Dionysus', her *Bacchae* excavates subconscious 'daimonic' desires.

Each of these translations, written by a prominent scholar, poet or playwright, brings an ancient theatrical masterpiece to a global anglophone

audience. *Bacchae* extends its shelf life by taking on new afterlives in translation; many if not most people now read it in English if at all. Each of these texts is also a literary work in its own right. Finally, each promotes a 'free play of mind' between itself, *Bacchae* and all the other echoes and afterimages accumulated in the play's reception. Therein lies the making of a classic. As such, my examples illustrate a fact of life and of critical theory: meanings are contingent and constructed; final interpretations are deferred, relative and illusory; perfect communication and perfect translation are impossible. At the same time, they bear out a deeply held assumption which any reader or writer knows to be true: words have meanings; words can mean the same thing to different people; communication and translation are possible. Translation *matters*. In *After Babel*, George Steiner claims that 'human communication equals translation'.²⁹ Lawrence Venuti, in turn, has called a recent book *Translation Changes Everything*.³⁰ And somewhere between those two positions lies something of the enduring appeal of classics, reception and translation. Even now, after two and a half millennia, people from all around the world who do not know ancient Greek are still interested in reading about 'Dionysus', Dionysus and the death of Pentheus. After all, if one wants to get to grips with ancient culture, or any culture for that matter, including one's own, then reading dramatic literature is a good place to start. Even, especially, in translation.

Appendix

Translations of Euripides' *Bacchae* published in English, 1781–2015

Note. Asterisks indicate volumes which contain other translations, poems or text by one or more ancient authors or modern translators. Square brackets indicate part-translations. Entries in bold indicate texts discussed in main chapters.

This list is as comprehensive and up to date as possible; I may have missed some translations available only in electronic form. Similar lists exist: Foster (1918) 46–56; Walton (2006) 230–5, 238–40; Walton (2008) 197 n. 5; Montgomery (2011) 91.

- *1781–3 R. Potter, in *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London: Dodsley)
- *1782 M. Wodhull, in *The Nineteen Tragedies and Fragments of Euripides* (London: Payne and Son)
- *1828 Anonymous; includes *Children of Heracles* (Oxford: Slatter)
- 1845 Mons. Glouton (Brighton: printed for the translator)
- 1846 Anonymous; includes *Children of Heracles* (London: Washbourne)
- *1850 T. A. Buckley, in *Euripides' Tragedies* (London: Bohn)
- *1865 H. H. Milman; includes Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and selections from Greek poets (London: Murray)
- 1872 J. E. T. Rogers (Oxford: Parker)
- 1876 G. O'Connor (Dublin: Ponsonby)
- 1886 W. J. Hickie (Dublin: Kelly)
- *1891 E. P. Coleridge, in *Euripides' Plays* (London: Bell and Sons)
- 1892 H. Hailstone (Cambridge: Hall and Son)
- 1896 W. H. Balgarnie and B. J. Hayes (London: Clive)
- *1894–8 A. S. Way, in *Euripides' Tragedies* (London: Macmillan)

- 1899 A. Kerr (Boston: Ginn)
- *1902 G. Murray; includes *Hippolytus* and Aristophanes' *Frogs* (London: Allen)**
- *[1909] R. E. McBride, in *The Revellers: The Choruses of the Bacchae of Euripides and the Third Book of Lucretius* (New York: Broadway)
- 1913 F. A. Evelyn (London: Heath, Cranton and Ouseley)
- 1923 A. Harvey (Girard, KS: Haldeman-Julius)
- 1925 J. M. Pryse, *The Adorers of Dionysus (Bakchai)* (Los Angeles: Pryse)
- 1926 M. K. Tennant (London: Methuen)
- 1930 D. W. Lucas (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes)
- *[1931] H.D., 'Choros Translations from *The Bacchae*', in *Red Roses for Bronze* (London: Chatto and Windus)**
- *1936 M. Hadas and J. McLean, in *The Plays of Euripides* (New York: Dial Press)
- *1954 F. L. Lucas, in *Greek Drama for Everyman* (London: Dent)
- *1954 P. Vellacott, in *The Bacchae and Other Plays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin)
- *1957 H. Birkhead, in L. R. Lind (ed.) *Ten Greek Plays in Contemporary Translation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin)
- *1959 W. Arrowsmith, in D. Grene and R. Lattimore (eds) *Euripides V* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press)
- *1960 N. Curry, in E. Bentley (ed.) *The Great Playwrights*, vol 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday)
- *1965 M. Volanakis, in R. Corrigan (ed.) *Euripides* (New York: Dell)
- 1968 D. Sutherland (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press)
- 1970 G. S. Kirk (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall)
- *1971 K. Cavander, in R. Corrigan (ed.) *Tragedy: A Critical Anthology* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin)
- *1972 C. Boer, in A. Cook and E. Dolin (eds) *An Anthology of Greek Tragedy* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill)
- 1972 Anonymous (Kentfield, CA: Allen Press)
- *1973 P. Vellacott, in *The Bacchae and Other Plays*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin)
- *1974 P. Roche, in *Three Plays of Euripides* (New York: Norton)
- 1978 R. Bagg (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press)

- *1980 C. Doria, in *The Tenth Muse: Classical Drama in Translation* (Chicago: University of Ohio Press)
- 1982 M. Cacoyannis (New York: New American Library)
- *1988 J. M. Walton, in Walton (ed.) *Euripides: Plays: I* (London: Methuen)
- *1988 A. Evans, in *The God of Ecstasy: Sex-Roles and the Madness of Dionysos* (New York: St Martin's Press)
- 1988 M. Neuberg (<http://sbc.apeth.com/downloads/bacchae.pdf>)
- 1990 C. K. Williams (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux)
- 1991 D. Mahon (Oldcastle, Co. Meath: Gallery Press)**
- 1992 J. Buller (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- *1993 F. Blessington; includes Aristophanes' *Frogs* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson)
- 1994 H. N. Koonce (Lexington, KY: MA thesis, University of Kentucky)
- 1995 R. E. Meagher (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci)
- 1996 N. Rudall (Chicago: Dee)
- 1996/2001 R. Seaford (Warminster: Aris & Phillips)
- *1997 D. M. Epstein, in D. R. Slavitt and P. Bovie (eds) *Euripides 1* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press)
- 1998 S. J. Esposito (Newburyport, MA: Focus)
- 1998 F. Raphael and K. McLeish (London: Nick Hern Books)
- 1998 P. Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett)
- *1999 J. Morwood, in *Bacchae and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- 2000 D. Franklin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- 2000 D. Stuttard (Brighton: aod publications)
- 2001 R. Gibbons (New York: Oxford University Press)
- 2001 H. Golder (New York: Applause)
- *2002 D. Kovacs, in *Euripides VI* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press)
- 2002 C. Teevan (London: Oberon)**
- 2004 M. J. Gould (Kent: Wave Crest Classics)
- [2004] S. Rao and G. Wolf; retold in prose with illustrations (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum)

- *2005 J. Davie, in *The Bacchae and Other Plays* (London: Penguin)
- *2005 C. Mueller, in *Euripides: The Complete Plays Volume IV*
(Hanover, NH: Smith and Kraus)
- 2005 G. Theodoridis (<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/theodoridisgbacchae.htm>)
- 2005 M. Valerie (<http://euripidesofathens.blogspot.com>)
- 2007 D. Greig (London: Faber and Faber)**
- 2008 I. Johnston (Arlington, VA: Richer Resources Publications)
- *2013 W. Arrowsmith, in M. Griffith and G. Most (eds) *Euripides V*,
rev. ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press)
- 2014 R. Robertson (London: Vintage)**
- 2015 A. Carson (London: Oberon)**

Glossary of Terms and Greek Words

crib, pony, trot A translation, usually in prose and often in TRANSLATIONESE, which is thought to closely reproduce the source text's semantic content.

domesticating and foreignizing translation An influential concept introduced by Friedrich Schleiermacher in his essay 'Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens' (On Different Translation Methods, 1813). Hand-in-glove with FLUENCY, domesticating strategies use TARGET-LANGUAGE culture to explain SOURCE-LANGUAGE culture.¹ Dryden's translation of Vergil's *Aeneid*, for example, is very much an English epic in the fullest sense of that phrase. Foreignization, in contrast, foregrounds the source-language (i.e. foreign) culture and its values. For Lawrence Venuti, the point is not just descriptive but ethical. Foreignization is somehow *better*: 'Foreignizing translation signifies the differences of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the translating language.'²

explicitation '[T]he technique of making explicit in the target text information that is implicit in the source text.'³ In addition to translation-inherent explicitation (which is a function of the translation process), obligatory explicitation (which comes about because of structural differences between languages) and optional explicitation (which comes about because of different stylistic norms), translating classical texts in English frequently involves pragmatic explicitation. 'Pragmatic explicitation of implicit cultural information is dictated by differences between cultures ... in such cases, translators often need to include explanations in translations.'⁴

fluency, fluent translation According to Venuti, fluency is the dominant mode of mainstream Anglo-American literary translation. Fluent translations use 'current ... widely used ... standard' English; 'linear syntax, univocal meaning, and varied meter produce an illusionistic effect of transparency: the translation seems as if it were not in fact a translation, but a text originally written in English.'⁵ To Venuti's chagrin, fluent translation strategies keep translations in print and translators invisible.⁶

invariant The elements of the SOURCE TEXT 'which remain unchanged in the process of translation.'⁷ The invariant is hypothetical and ideological, as Venuti observes: 'Since canons of accuracy vary according to culture and historical moment, definitions of what constitutes the invariant will likewise vary.'⁸ I myself

would minimally define the invariant of *Bacchae* as including, at the very least, SPARAGMOS.

maenad (μαῖνάς; *mainas*) Literally, 'mad': a woman inspired to ritual frenzy by Dionysus.

Maenads are also called *Bacchantes* (Latin), *Bacchae* (Latin) or *Bakkhai* (Greek).

modernizing and archaizing translation A parallel category to DOMESTICATING/FOREIGNIZING. Modernizing strategies make source texts sound, and seem, contemporary, even to the point of anachronism; archaizing translation uses outmoded words, ideas and forms.

parodos (πάροδος) The entry-song of the chorus in Greek drama.

source culture The sociocultural context in which the SOURCE TEXT was created.

source language = start language (SL) The language of the SOURCE TEXT.

source text = start text (ST) The translated text; the 'original'. This is not always the actual text used by a translator; literary translation can happen via mediating texts.

sparagmos (σπαράγμός) 'Tearing apart', especially of Pentheus.

target culture The sociocultural context in which the TARGET TEXT was created.

target language = translating language (TL) The language of the TARGET TEXT.

target text = translating text (TT) The foreign-language text which purports to reproduce the SOURCE TEXT; the 'translation'.

thiasos (θίασος) A company of Dionysus' worshippers.⁹

thursos (θύρσος, plural 'thursoi') A ceremonial implement associated with Dionysus. The basic form is a fennel stalk wound with ivy leaves.

translator The historical person who composed the TARGET TEXT; the presumptive author of the translation, distinct from the author or narratorial persona/e of the SOURCE TEXT. Outside of the literary establishment, it is typically assumed that the translator (1) is fluent in both languages and (2) has worked directly from the source text.

the translator's invisibility The notion, proposed in Venuti's widely read book of the same name, that literary translators are undervalued in the West. When it comes to translation, the 'values that prevail in contemporary British and American cultures' include 'the canon of fluency in translation, the dominance of transparent discourse, [and] the individualistic illusion of authorial presence'.¹⁰ Simply put: Anglo-American culture wants literary translators out of sight and out of mind; translation norms and market forces keep them there.¹¹

translationese = translatese = translatorese The supposed dialect of over-literal translations; a translators' argot which reveals the 'translatedness' of a TARGET TEXT; a general word for what bad translation sounds like, defined in opposition to FLUENT translation. According to its detractors, translationese is stilted, lumpy and awkward.¹²

Notes

Introduction

- 1 Perris (2015).
- 2 Bassnett (2014b) 15.
- 3 Scholion (scholarly note preserved in medieval manuscripts) on Aristophanes, *Frogs* 67; *Suda*, s.v. *Euripides* (Εὐριπίδης). For ancient evidence about Euripides' life, see Kovacs (1994).
- 4 See pp. 40–1 for further discussion. Popularity in antiquity: Funke (1965–1966); Dodds xxix n.1 and xxxiii; Roux 72–7; Kuch (1978); Conte (1994) 104–7; Seaford 52–4; Mills (2006) 103–5; Friesen (2015); Perris (2015) 508–11.
- 5 Mac Góráin (2013).
- 6 Hinds (2002) 139.
- 7 Literally, 'he performed on the lyre an *Attis* or *Bacchae*' (ἐκίθαρώδησέ τε Ἄτιν τινὰ ἢ Βάκχας).
- 8 *Bacch.* 836, 317–18.
- 9 Puchner (2002) 307.
- 10 Friesen (2015) 251–60.
- 11 Perris (2012a) 21–2 with n. 2. An APGRD database search confirms these observations.
- 12 Hartigan (1995) 82.
- 13 UCL production: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/classics/classical-play/archive/2015Bacchae> (accessed 31 August 2015). Chris Vervain Mask Theatre: http://home.btconnect.com/chrisvervain.org.uk/The_Bacchae_.html (accessed 31 August 2015).
- 14 Almeida Theatre website: <http://www.almeida.co.uk/whats-on/bakkhai/23-jul-2015-19-sep-2015> (accessed 31 August 2015).
- 15 See e.g. the essays in O. Murray (2007) on the idea of a Greek cultural revolution in the late fifth and early fourth centuries.
- 16 Billings (forthcoming); text supplied by the author.
- 17 See Zuntz (1965) on the transmission of Euripides' texts and Garland (2004) on the survival of Greek tragedy in general.
- 18 Easterling (1997a) 216–17 considers the role of family archives in transmitting Greek dramatic texts.

- 19 Walton (2008) 189.
- 20 Poole (2006) 182.
- 21 Schechner (1970); Soyinka (1973) xiii.
- 22 E. Hall, 'Classics for the people – why we should all learn from the ancient Greeks', *The Guardian*, 20 June 2015. Hall paraphrases G. Murray, *The Place of Greek in Education* (Glasgow: Maclehose and Sons, 1889) 13: 'Greece and not Greek is the real subject of our study.' See also E. Hall (2008) on classics and education and Martindale (2013) 181–2 n. 32 on the place of languages in classics and classical reception pedagogy.
- 23 See e.g. the essays in Lianeri and Zajko (2008); Gillespie (2011) 1–19.
- 24 Morley (2008).
- 25 Rutherford (2012) 27.
- 26 Martindale (1993) 7. *Classical Receptions Journal* 5.2 is a special issue devoted to *Redeeming the Text*; see especially Martindale (2013). Further background reading in classical reception: Hardwick (2000); Hardwick (2003a); Martindale and Thomas (2006); Kallendorf (2007); Hardwick and Stray (2008).
- 27 Carne-Ross (2010).
- 28 Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990) v–xvi; the authors address their use of English on p. v.
- 29 Perris (2015) concentrates on anglophone receptions.
- 30 Haynes (2003); Gillespie (2011).
- 31 Further background reading in translation studies: Venuti (2008a), (2012); Bassnett (2014a), (2014b); Baker and Saldanha (2009); Pym (2014).
- 32 I had more or less settled my own ideas on translation when Reynolds (2011) appeared and well before Reynolds (2013) did; it was gratifying to discover that we are, to use a fitting metaphor, on the same page much of the time. Reynolds's concept of the 'poetry of translation' is his own brilliant invention.
- 33 Reynolds (2011) 4.
- 34 Bassnett (2014a) 14; Bassnett (2014b) 2. See Bassnett (2014a) 24–49 on problems with the layperson's view. Venuti (2008a) attacks the dominant anglophone version of that view.
- 35 Nida (1964/2012) 141.
- 36 Georges Mounin, *Les problèmes théoriques de la traduction* (1963) 5, quoted and translated by Pym (1995) 158.
- 37 Reynolds (2011) 3–11, 32–8, quoted at 38. See also Bassnett (2014a) 14–17, (2014b) 146–67.
- 38 Reynolds (2011) 6; Catford (1965) 1, cited in Reynolds (2011) 19–20; Venuti (2008a) 13.
- 39 Pym (2014) chapters 4–8. See also e.g. Koller (1995).

- 40 Pym (1995), (2014) 6–42, 159–60; Bassnett (2014a) 33–9.
- 41 Nida (1964/2012) 149.
- 42 Nida and Taber (1969) 200.
- 43 Reynolds (2013).
- 44 Pseudo-translation: Toury (2012) 47. May (2000) 1208 describes Nabokov's *Eugene Onegin* as an 'anti-translation'; Coldiron (2015) 258–60 treats macaronic verse as 'anti-translation'. See also e.g. Sawako Nakayasu's *Mouth: Eats Color; Sagawa Chika Translations, Anti-Translations, and Originals* (2011) and Anne Carson's *Antigonick* (2012).
- 45 Borges (1964/1970) 68. See also Reynolds (2011) 12–16 on translation within languages. Bassnett (2014b) 116–18 uses the same Borges example to illustrate the limits of translation.
- 46 Sullivan (1964) 95–104 brings Latin 'mistakes' into the ambit of Pound's poetics.
- 47 Pym (1995) 167; Gutt (2000) 196 (emphasis original). See also Pym (2014) 37, 159–60.
- 48 Hermans (2007/2014) 1–25, quoted at 24.
- 49 Bassnett (1998) 39.
- 50 Reynolds (2011) 24–5.
- 51 Hermans (2007/2014) 23. Baker (1992) 217–60 describes a different 'pragmatic equivalence' based on the subfield of linguistics known as pragmatics.
- 52 Catford (1965) 49, 1. See also Reynolds (2011) 19–20, 27: 'There is such a thing as a sufficient degree of equivalence.'
- 53 Toury (1985) 22 (emphasis added). Some readers, for example, might consider Mike Poulton's 'version' of *Bacchae* (Chapter 2) as much a translation as David Greig's 'version' (Chapter 7).
- 54 Vermeer (1989/2012), quoted at 191. Pym (2014) 43–61 considers the place of 'purpose' in translation theories.
- 55 See e.g. Reynolds (2011) 20–2 on the difficulty of sorting out *skopoi*.
- 56 Genette (1987/1997). See e.g. Silk (2013) 26 n. 40.
- 57 Dutton (2003) 259 (emphasis original).
- 58 Gamel (2010), (2013).
- 59 Gamel (2010) 159. Despite conceptual slippage between nominal/expressive authenticity, formal/dynamic equivalence and foreignizing/domesticating strategies, Gamel's basic point stands.
- 60 One thinks especially of Dodds (first edition 1944) and Winnington-Ingram (1948).
- 61 Reynolds (2011), esp. 46–55. This is not to be a unified theory but rather a set of 'tactics of interpretation' (p. 302). See also Reynolds (2013) 132–44, 'How to Read a Translation', especially p. 143: 'It is characteristic of translation to find energy and delight in a saying of that which it is enacting.'

- 62 Reynolds (2011) 55.
- 63 Chapman (1915) 110.
- 64 Segal (1997) 4, 5.
- 65 Heath (1987) 90. See pp. 71–80 on intellectualizing readings of tragedy.
- 66 Heath (1987) 77.
- 67 Fischer-Lichte (2014) 230.
- 68 Perris (2010).
- 69 Reynolds (2011) 53.
- 70 Worthen (2005): print culture and page design have shaped the development of both modern poetry and modern drama.
- 71 E. Gregory (1997) 55.
- 72 Dewhurst (2005) 247.
- 73 Krebs (2012) 47–8, quoted at 47.
- 74 I treat both Derek Mahon's *Bacchae* (Chapter 5), which is 'after Euripides', and the 'versions' by David Greig (Chapter 7) and Anne Carson (Chapter 8) as translations; but I include Mike Poulton's 'version', which superficially resembles these other texts, in a survey of adaptations (Chapter 2).
- 75 Bassnett (2014a) 90. See Reynolds (2011) 37, 301–3; Pym (2014) 39 on problems with binary oppositions in translation theory.
- 76 Bastin (2009) 3.
- 77 Sanders (2006) 19; Hutcheon (2006) 8, 170. Compare Sanders (2006) 26: 'An adaptation signals a relationship with an informing sourcetext or original.'
- 78 Walton (2006) on translating Greek tragedy; Macintosh (2009) on the performance history of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*; Carne-Ross (2010) on classics and translation; and Fischer-Lichte (2014) on modern plays about Dionysus have been especially formative.

Chapter 1: Reading *Bacchae*, Reading Dionysus

- 1 Dunn (2011).
- 2 Bierl (1991) 181: 'Den Inhalt der *Bakchen* kann man als zusammenhängende Epiphanie des Dionysus beschreiben.' Seaford (2012) 84–95: Dionysus' advent in Thebes reflects processional aspects of the dramatic festival. See also Segal (1997) 351 n. 5 for bibliography and Henrichs (2011) on Dionysus and epiphany.
- 3 The manuscripts record one insignificant variation which most editors reject: Θηβαίων (*Thēbaiōn*), 'of the Thebans'.
- 4 Or, word for word: *I have come / Zeus's / son / to this / Theban / land / Dionysus.*

- 5 Dodds on *Bacch.* 1; Roux on *Bacch.* 1. See Eur. *Hec.* 1 (Polydorus' ghost), *Tro.* 1 (Poseidon), *Ion* 5 (Hermes); and [Aesch.] *PV* 284 (Oceanus).
- 6 Dodds on *Bacch.* 1–63.
- 7 Barrett (1964) on *Hipp.* 1–2. Dionysus does not use the verb 'to be'; he combines a finite verb ('I have come') with noun phrases in apposition to the subject, himself ('Zeus's son ... Dionysus'). Non-restrictive apposition, far more regular in Greek than in English, readily stands in for predication: see Bertrand (2014).
- 8 Méridier, quoted by Dodds on *Bacch.* 1.
- 9 Aesch. *Ag.* 1487–8; Soph. *Trach.* 1278. Compare Soph. *OT* 1329: 'This was Apollo'.
- 10 Dunkel (1995) 13.
- 11 Szemerényi (1971) 665; Dunkel (1995) 10–13. Contrast Beekes (2010) s.v. Διόνυσος: 'Since all attempts to find an IE etymology have failed, we have to accept that it is a foreign name.' Chantraine (2009) s.v. Διόνυσος is sceptical: 'Le second terme [-νυσος] est beaucoup plus obscur'. See also Dodds on *Bacch.* 556–9.
- 12 Roux on *Bacch.* 1. See also Roux 649, s.v. Ζεύς; Dodds on *Bacch.* 1.
- 13 The other Greek word for 'of Zeus', *Zēnos* (Ζηνός), occurs only once in *Bacchae*, in the passage just cited. It appears frequently in Euripides; the trochaic rhythm suits dialogue metres perfectly well.
- 14 Translatability and untranslatability: Hermans (2009); Bassnett (2014a) 40–7.
- 15 Henderson (2003) 23. *Amphitheos*: literally, 'divine on both sides (of the family)'. *Dikaiopolis*: literally, 'well-governed' (adj.) or 'city of justice' (n.).
- 16 Pound (1954/1969) 24: in his translation of Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*, Ezra Pound nicknames Heracles 'HERAKLES ZEUSON, the Solar vitality'. See p. 84.
- 17 Dodds on *Bacch.* 1.
- 18 The verb *tiktein* can be ambiguous, but see Gantz (1993) 112: 'the context makes it quite clear that the woman's role [in the verb *etikte*] is what is intended'.
- 19 Gantz (1993) 113.
- 20 Bernabé (2004) fragments 296–331; see M. L. West (1983) 74.
- 21 Schlesier (2011); Bernabé et al. (2013); Massa (2014); Isler-Kerényi (2015); Wylter (forthcoming). The 'Dionysus in Rome' conference took place at University College London on 3–4 September 2015. Fiachra Mac Góráin's monograph, provisionally entitled *Virgil's Dionysus*, promises to be an important work in this area.
- 22 Henrichs (1993) 13–14. Henrichs (1984) 205 includes 'ritual madness' instead of maenadism.
- 23 Cole (2010). Hdt. 4.79 describes the initiation of the Scythian king Scyles into the cult of Dionysus Bacchaeus at Olbia. 'Iacchus' and the Mysteries: Aristophanes, *Frogs* 323–5; Soph. *Ant.* 1146–54; Eur. *Bacch.* 725–6.

- 24 Henrichs (1993) 14. Other treatments of the modern Dionysus, with bibliography, include Seaford (2006) 6–12, 133–45; Isler-Kerényi (2007) 235–54.
- 25 See e.g. Henrichs (1984, 1993).
- 26 Pater (1901) 9. See Henrichs (1984) 237–9 on Pater's essay.
- 27 Pater (1901) 10.
- 28 Pater (1901) 14.
- 29 Dodds xii. The phrase 'liquid nature' comes from Plutarch's essay *Isis and Osiris*: 'Liquid nature was the beginning and genesis of everything, and from itself produced the three original elements: earth, air, and fire' (365c3–4).
- 30 Kerényi (1976); Detienne (1986/1989); Evans (1988). See also e.g. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988) 181–8, 381–412 on Dionysus, *Bacchae* and masks.
- 31 See e.g. Versnel (1990) 96–205; Seaford; Lawrence (2013) 283–304.
- 32 Mikalson (1991).
- 33 Carpenter (1986, 1997).
- 34 Carpenter (1986) 126.
- 35 Isler-Kerényi (2007) 231–3, quoted at 231. See also Seaford (1994).
- 36 Winnington-Ingram (1948) 179.
- 37 Chapman (1915) 19; Dodds v; Friedrich (2000) 115; Robertson (2014) xix.
- 38 See Bierl (1991) 177–8 on the riddle ('Rätsel') of *Bacchae* and Oranje (1984) 1–19 on the history of *Bacchae* interpretations. Rationalizing interpretation: Norwood (1908); Verrall (1910) 1–163. Psychological and psychoanalytical interpretation: Dodds; Sale (1972); Segal (1997) 356 n. 19 for bibliography. Ritual: Seaford. The ritualist view is controversial: Friedrich (2000, 2001); Seaford (2000, 2002, 2016). Among the voluminous bibliography on Dionysus and tragedy, see e.g. Winkler and Zeitlin (1990); Bierl (1991); Scullion (2005).
- 39 See e.g. Powers (2014) 6–7, 56–7; *Bacchae* 'provides more evidence on fifth-century Athenian performance than any other extant play' (7); 'arguably the best resource for reconstructing a choral performance' (56). On stagecraft in *Bacchae*, see also Wyles (2016); Sampatakakis (forthcoming).
- 40 Sampatakakis (2004).
- 41 Abel (1963) introduced the term 'metatheatre'; Rosenmeyer (2002) critiques its use in classics. On metatheatre and *Bacchae*, see e.g. Foley (1985) 205–58 and Segal (1997) 215–71. Taplin (1986) addresses metatheatre in tragedy and comedy.
- 42 Bierl (1991) 182. Tragedy and metatragedy in *Bacchae*: Radke (2003), esp. p. 265. Metatheatre: Segal (1997) 215–71; Dunn (2011). Metafiction: Dobrov (2001) 70–85. Metapoetics: Torrance (2013) 136–7.
- 43 Bierl (1991) 21–5, 56–8. See also Seaford (1994); Isler-Kerényi (2015) 241.
- 44 Segal (1997) 341.
- 45 Segal (1997) 343.

- 46 Bierl (1991) 1: 'Damit entzieht er sich jeglichem Versuch einer präzisen Definition. Schließlich kann er für fast alles stehen und ist daher eine göttliche Unbekannte, die mit den größten denkbaren Widersprüchen aufgefüllt werden kann.' See also pp. 180–1 on Segal.
- 47 Storm (1998); McConnell (2015).
- 48 Fischer-Lichte (2014) 21.
- 49 Taplin (1977) 1–60 on structure, 470–6 on problems with Aristotle's terminology.
- 50 Spoken dialogue: mostly iambic trimeter; less frequently in extant texts, trochaic tetrameter (supposedly the original metre of speech in tragedy). Chant: anapaestic metres; possibly dactylic hexameter on occasion. Song: lyric metres; hexameters and elegiac couplets on occasion.
- 51 Dodds xxviii.
- 52 Sommerstein (2016) 29–33, 40 n. 2.
- 53 Sommerstein (2008) 171.
- 54 Sommerstein (2016) 39.
- 55 Sommerstein (2016) 33, 39–40. Aeschylus may have invented Agaue's role in the killing.
- 56 Sommerstein (2016), esp. 39–40.
- 57 Kitto (1961/2011) 313; Seaford 28. Perris (2012a) 21: the structure is 'finely wrought'.
- 58 On the 'unities' and their influence, see Heath (1989) 38–55; Halliwell (1998) 286–323.
- 59 Unity: Heath (1989). Unity in tragedy: Heath (1987) 98–111.
- 60 A. W. Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Litteratur* (1809–11), vol. 1, 256–7, quoted and translated by Billings (forthcoming).
- 61 See e.g. Arthur (1972) on the odes.
- 62 Bierl (2013).
- 63 Murray (1913) 184, quoted by Dodds xxxvi.
- 64 *Oedipus at Colonus*: Dunn (2011). *Iphigenia in Aulis*: Caspers (2012). Aristophanes' *Frogs*: Wyles (2016) 69–70.
- 65 Carpenter (1997) 119–23.
- 66 Dodds xxxviii.
- 67 Perris (2014).
- 68 Heath (1987).
- 69 Perris (2011a).
- 70 Radke (2003).
- 71 Diggle (1994b) 351 marks these lines as inauthentic. See Barrett (1964) on *Hipp.* 1462–6.
- 72 Dodds on *Bacch.* 1388–92.

- 73 The classic discussion is Seidensticker (1982) 115–29, accessible in an earlier English version in Seidensticker (1978). See also e.g. Silk (2013) 25, 32.
- 74 See e.g. E. Hall (2002) on the fundamental unknowability of Dionysus in *Bacchae*.
- 75 On tragic emotions in general, see e.g. Halliwell (1998) 168–201; Munteanu (2012). On audience response to *Bacchae*, see e.g. Perris (2011a); E. Hall (2016). See Leinieks (1996) for an account of the play's intellectual texture.

Chapter 2: Rated R: Adaptation, Violence, Revolution

- 1 Pater (1901) 49–50.
- 2 Perris (2015), esp. 508; van Zyl Smit (2016). Adaptation and translation: Raw (2012); Krebs (2013). Adaptations of Greek tragedy: Lauriola and Demetriou (2015); Liapis and Sidiropoulou (forthcoming). Much of the present chapter redacts Perris (2015).
- 3 Soyinka (1973) v.
- 4 Fischer-Lichte (2014) 68.
- 5 Hunter (2006) 47.
- 6 Fratantuono (2011) 82.
- 7 See e.g. Nonn. *Dion.* 44.17, 44.50, 46.352–5, 46.356–9.
- 8 Hardie (1990); Friesen (2015) 100–1.
- 9 Anderson, Mathiesen and Anderson (n. d.).
- 10 Ewans (2007) 165.
- 11 Cowan (2010); Perris (2015) 524–6.
- 12 Samson (n. d.).
- 13 Ewans (2007) 172.
- 14 Stiller (n. d.).
- 15 R. Saltz, 'Some Violence from Euripides' Hard Rock-Period' (review), *The New York Times*, 8 October 2007.
- 16 Freeks Theater: <http://thefreekstheater.wix.com/freeks#!bacchae/c79o> (accessed 31 August 2015).
- 17 Discussion and bibliography: Michelakis (2013) 40; Kyriakos (2013) 16–17; Perris (2015) 538–9. Kyriakos considers Costas Ferris's *Oh! Babylon* (1989) a further film reception of *Bacchae*.
- 18 Michelakis (2013) 40.
- 19 Perris (2015) 517 n. 43 lists examples.
- 20 Dick (1964); Roncace (1997).

- 21 Golding, quoted in Dick (1965) 481 (emphasis original); Golding also impishly maintains that he has never seen a coral island. Golding (1958) 43: in *The Brass Butterfly*, Mamillius knows *Bacchae* from memory.
- 22 Golding (1954) 15–16.
- 23 Golding (1954) 169.
- 24 Sanders (2006) 26–41. ‘Appropriation’ is also a suitable descriptor for *The Secret History* and *La caverna de las ideas* (discussed later in this chapter).
- 25 Renault (1966) 1, 136, 143–53.
- 26 Tartt (1992) 273; Dodds (1951).
- 27 Tartt (1992) 42. Julian is embellishing, not simply inventing; e.g. *Bacch.* 699–702, 150, 862–76 (personal communication, Fiachra Mac Góráin).
- 28 Somoza (2002) 278.
- 29 Somoza (2002) 296–7; also 155, 278.
- 30 Finkel (1959) 130.
- 31 Amcotts and Anson (1866) 9.
- 32 Amcotts and Anson (1866) 9.
- 33 S. H. Smith (1986) 116–17 lists modern plays about Dionysus and/or Pentheus. General discussions of theatrical adaptations of *Bacchae*: Hersh (1992); E. H. Winkler (1993); Rubik (1998); Fusillo (2006); Mills (2006) 103–20; Fischer-Lichte (2014). Discussions of specific adaptations: Plum (1991) on *A Mouthful of Birds*; P. J. Smith (2003) on *The Erpingham Camp*; Zeitlin (2004) on *Dionysus in 69*; Siegel (2005) on *Suddenly Last Summer*; Hall and Macintosh (2005) 505–8 on *Major Barbara*; Davidson (2007) on *Mr O’Dwyer’s Dancing Party*. Fitzpatrick Dean (2003) 51–2 sees a ‘linkage’ between *Bacchae* and Brian Friel’s *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990); I read an intertext rather than a hypotext. Perris (2015) 533 n. 109 notes further examples and references.
- 34 Hall and Macintosh (2005) 499.
- 35 Bolt (1964) 109.
- 36 *Ritual* 2378 is obscure. Regrettably, Perris (2015) mentions neither this play; nor *Bacchus in die Boland* (1954), by Afrikaans playwright Bartho Smit; nor Mike Poulton’s *Bacchae* (2010). Dominik (2007) 105–9: *Bacchus in die Boland* alludes to, but does not adapt, *Bacchae*.
- 37 Love (2011) 10.
- 38 See Marwick (1998) 3–22, ‘Was There a Cultural Revolution c.1958–c.1974?’
- 39 See e.g. Jones (1994); Rankine (2008) 152–79; Handler (2010).
- 40 Paglia (1990) 102; see also pp. 72–98 on ‘Apollo and Dionysus’.
- 41 Hobsbawm (1994); Marwick (1998).
- 42 Fischer-Lichte (2014) 22. See Perris (2015) 528–32 for discussion of other productions not mentioned specifically here.

- 43 Ferguson (1977) 65, 91 (emphasis original), 98.
- 44 Green (1994) 45.
- 45 Poulton (2010) 87.
- 46 Perris (2011a).
- 47 Offstage violence in adaptations of Greek tragedy: Laera (2013) 133–202; Perris (forthcoming).
- 48 Grose et al. (2005) 70: in the original performance, the three chorus-members, who don tutus before the opening scene, were men.
- 49 Hobsbawm (1994) 54.
- 50 Hobsbawm (1994) 22, 52.
- 51 *Trans Tasmin*, first drafted in 2013, has not yet been staged; the play was read at the Court Theatre, Christchurch (New Zealand) on 7 June 2015. See <http://www.boosted.org.nz/projects/trans-tasmin> (accessed 4 January 2016); <http://www.eventfinda.co.nz/2015/mid-winter-reading-trans-tasmin-by-robert-gilbert/christchurch-city> (accessed 4 January 2016). ‘The Māori *Bacchae*’: <http://www.ellinikotheatro.org/the-maori-bacchae/> (accessed 4 January 2016).
- 52 John Davidson (personal communication).

Chapter 3: Dionysus, Lord and Saviour

- 1 See Collard (2007), Griffith (2007) and Morwood (2007) respectively on Murray’s work as a textual critic, literary critic and translator.
- 2 Murray (1902).
- 3 See e.g. Easterling (1997b); Morwood (2007). Bracketed references in this chapter indicate original page numbers of Murray (1904), accessible in Murray (2005) 385–470.
- 4 See e.g. Perris (2011b) on Murray’s *Trojan Women*.
- 5 Csapo and Slater (1995) 45 (#108) = SIG³648B.
- 6 Murray’s *Bacchae*: APGRD 6316. 1908 production: APGRD 555.
- 7 For the production history, see Wilson (1987) 163–4; Hall and Macintosh (2005) 498; Macintosh (2007) 156–9. For a negative review, see ‘Court Theatre’ (1908).
- 8 This paragraph owes much to Macintosh (2009) 112–23.
- 9 Macintosh (2009) 113.
- 10 Macintosh (2009) 114.
- 11 Dodds vii.
- 12 Shaw (1905/1960) 7.

- 13 See Hall and Macintosh (2005) 488–520, ‘The Shavian Euripides and the Euripidean Shaw: Greek Tragedy and the New Drama’.
- 14 Soyinka (1973) xiii; see Macintosh (2007) 147.
- 15 Macintosh (2007) 160–5.
- 16 See e.g. Chapman (1915) 103–4; Morwood (2007) 135.
- 17 Morwood (2007) 142.
- 18 Wilson (1987) 164.
- 19 Murray (1913) 185–8.
- 20 *Bacch.* 1388: ‘divine things (*ta daimonia*) take many forms.’
- 21 Murray (1902) viii, quoted on p. 75.
- 22 *Bacch.* 883–4: ‘divine strength’. *Bacch.* 878: ‘gift from the gods’.
- 23 See also, more recently, Detienne (1986/1989) 33–7, subtitled ‘Blood of Heaven, Blood of Earth’.
- 24 Roux on *Bacch.* 284 identifies a verbal reminiscence in the Greek.
- 25 See e.g. Hes. *Op.* 3–5 for the usual sense of *διά* + accusative in ancient Greek, ‘because of X, through (the agency) of X’.
- 26 The beatitude section of the liturgy comes from Psalm 118: ‘Blessed [*eulogēmenos* in the Septuagint] is he who comes in the name of the Lord’ (Ps. 118.26).
- 27 See e.g. *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 480–2: whichever of the ‘people who walk the earth’ who has ‘seen’ the mysteries is fortunate (*olbios*), but ‘whoever is not initiated into the rituals, who does not partake, does not have an equal share when he is dead and down below the murky gloom’.
- 28 E.g. Burkert (1985) 246–50; Edmonds (2013) 377–8.
- 29 Examples of sight and blindness in scripture: Gen. 3.5, 6.8; Ps. 146.8; Isa. 35.5; Mt. 6.22–3; Jn 9; Acts 9.1–18, 26.18. Examples from Murray’s *Bacchae*: ‘Blind before, and now indeed / Most mad!’ (22); ‘Thebes is blinded. Thou and I can see’ (16); ‘I speak not from mine art, / But as I see – blind words and a blind heart!’ (22); ‘I ... [have] vision and ye [are] blind!’ (31); ‘bear thee humbly in God’s sight’ (21); ‘avert thine eyes / From the lore of the wise, / That have honour in proud men’s sight’ (25).
- 30 Seed of David: Jn 7.42; Acts 13.23; Rom. 1.3. Parable of the Sower: Mt. 13.1–23; Mk 4.1–20; Lk. 8.4–15.
- 31 See also Job 4.8; Mic. 6.15; Hos. 8.7; Ps. 126.5–6.
- 32 Turner (1981) 35.
- 33 F. West (1984) 12.
- 34 Seaver (1912/1914). Proto-Christian interpretation of *Bacchae* reached an absurd nadir in Merrill (2013) 198–264.
- 35 ‘Court Theatre’ (1908).
- 36 ‘Court Theatre’ (1908).
- 37 Hall and Macintosh (2005) 498.

- 38 Chapman (1915) 98.
- 39 Chapman (1915) 103.
- 40 Chapman (1915) 103.
- 41 Chapman (1915) 105.
- 42 Chapman (1915) 107–8. Murray (1913) 191 addresses ‘God’ and ‘the Divine’ in Euripides.
- 43 Chapman (1915) 109.
- 44 Morwood (2007) 139.
- 45 This paragraph is based on Perris (2011b) 435; see 440 n. 74 for bibliography on Murray’s Hellenism.
- 46 F. West (1984) 69.
- 47 Murray (1913) 190.
- 48 Murray (1913) 243.
- 49 Murray (1916) 273.
- 50 For an account of the problem, see e.g. Scullion (2005).
- 51 Murray (1921) 78.
- 52 E.g. Wells (1920) 505–7. Wells thanks Gilbert Murray (and others) on the title page of *The Outline of History*.
- 53 *Bacch.* 430–3: ‘I would follow whatever practice most people think is normal’.
- 54 Toynbee (1960) 215.
- 55 Dodds on *Bacch.* 430–3 cites positive uses of *phaulos* and quotes Murray on the ‘simple man’.
- 56 ‘It is not hard to believe that these things hold sway: divine power, whatever it is, and that which is lawful and natural over a long period of time’ (*Bacch.* 893–6).
- 57 ‘I say that whoever lives a happy life every day is fortunate’ (*Bacch.* 910–11).
- 58 Murray (1921) 84–5. Compare Wells (1920) 506: ‘The thoughts of [Chinese thinker] Mo Ti came close to the Kingdom of Heaven.’
- 59 Perris (2011b).
- 60 Murray (2005) 5.
- 61 Perris (2011b) 424–32.
- 62 Murray (1902) viii.
- 63 Toynbee (1960) 215.
- 64 Eliot (1951) 59–64, quoted at 61, 64.
- 65 Hall and Macintosh (2005) 493.
- 66 Burian (1997) 273.
- 67 Bowra (1966) 216; Burian (2000) 982.
- 68 Morwood (2005) x.
- 69 Morwood (2005) x.

70 Bowra (1966) 216.

71 Soyinka (1973) x–xi.

Chapter 4: Nothing to Do with Modernism?

- 1 For the purposes of this chapter it is convenient to lump Yeats in with Pound and Eliot, even though Yeats was not a full-blooded Modernist.
- 2 Auden and Kallman's libretto for Henze's *The Bassarids* (1966), an adaptation of *Bacchae*, does not really count. The score is Modernist but the libretto is not; Auden mostly rejected Modernist poetics. See p. 42.
- 3 Sullivan (1964) 18. Sullivan alludes to T. S. Eliot's famous essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent': Eliot (1951) 13–22.
- 4 Sullivan (1964) 18. Gillespie (2011) 20–32: creative translation enriches target-language literary culture.
- 5 Sullivan (1964) 22.
- 6 Gillespie (2011) 29.
- 7 Yao (2002) 238. See also Venuti (2008a) 164–236 on Modernist translation. Sullivan (1964) maintains that Pound's *Homage* deserves to be read as a more or less independent poem.
- 8 'Catullus (the book of Gaius Valerius Catullus of Verona)'.
- 9 See Bernstein (1992). 'Men in Aida' translates the *Iliad*, the first line of which, in Greek, begins *mēnin aeide, thea* ('Goddess, sing the wrath ...').
- 10 Zukofsky and Zukofsky (1969) n.p.
- 11 Zukofsky and Zukofsky (1969) n.p.
- 12 Sullivan (1964); Horáček (2014).
- 13 See Wray (2005).
- 14 Yao (2002) 233.
- 15 Lowell (1961) xi, xii. Likewise: 'I have been almost as free as the authors themselves in finding ways to make them ring right for me' (xiii).
- 16 Mahon (2006) 11.
- 17 Jankowski (1969) 9. See Carne-Ross (2010) 238–49 on Greek tragedy in Modernist translation.
- 18 Bracketed references in this section of the chapter indicate Pound (1954/1969).
- 19 Soph. *Trach.* 205–15: 'Let the house shout out the *ololugē*, receiving the groom with happy shouts at the fireside. All the men, shout together in honour of Apollo, comrade with the excellent quiver, and all you girls raise up a paean to his sister, Ortygian Artemis, deersooter, fire-carrier, and her neighbours, the Nymphs.'

- 20 The phenomena I have observed are even more pronounced in Pound and Fleming (1989), a translation of Sophocles' *Electra* drafted five years before the *Women of Trachis* but left unpublished.
- 21 Spears (1970) 35.
- 22 Contrast e.g. Stead (1986), especially 38–9: Modernist poetry is essentially free verse organized by collage techniques.
- 23 Spears (1970) 48–53.
- 24 Pound (2011) 112, 129–31.
- 25 L. Littlefield, letter to the editor, *Paideuma* 1.1 (1972) 131.
- 26 Spears (1970) 51.
- 27 Silk and Stern (1981) 62–89 summarize the argument. See e.g. Gooding-Williams (1987) on Nietzsche and Modernism.
- 28 Silk and Stern (1981) 171–8.
- 29 Silk and Stern (1981) 168.
- 30 *The Great God Brown* (= *GGB*) II.i, O'Neill (1988) 502.
- 31 *GGB* III.i, O'Neill (1988) 516, 520.
- 32 Cybele: the prostitute character and mother substitute, Cybel. Pan: *GGB* II.iii, O'Neill (1988) 508. Silenus: *GGB* II.iii, O'Neill (1988) 509. Bacchus: *GGB* II.iii, O'Neill (1988) 508.
- 33 *New York Evening Post*, 13 February 1926.
- 34 See e.g. Ben-Zvi (1981).
- 35 Hinden (1973) 129–30.
- 36 O. Cargill, 'Fusion-Point of Jung and Nietzsche', in O. Cargill, N. Bryllion Fagin and W. J. Fisher (eds) *O'Neill and His Plays* (New York: New York University Press, 1963) 412–13, cited by Hinden (1973) 130.
- 37 Hinden (1973). *Lazarus Laughed* (1925) includes even more explicit comparison, this time of Lazarus to Dionysus. See e.g. the stage directions in *GGB* II.i, O'Neill (1988) 570–1.
- 38 Valgemmae (1968) 29.
- 39 H.D. (1983) 223–31. For details of the relevant Greek passages, see E. Gregory (1997) 247; the appendix to Gregory's book provides a compendium of classical material in H.D.'s oeuvre. For a chronology of works with publication and composition dates, see Friedman (1990) 360–6.
- 40 Swann (1962) 10, cited in E. Gregory (1997) 55 and Beyers (2001) 137.
- 41 E. Gregory (1997) 55.
- 42 E. Gregory (1997) 247: H.D. used Mario Meunier's 1923 translation.
- 43 E. Gregory (1997) 191.
- 44 Pound (1913).
- 45 'I will sing hymns to Dionysus, traditional songs from long ago' (*Bacch.* 70).

- 46 Bracketed references in the rest of the chapter indicate page numbers of H.D. (1983), the *Collected Poems*. See H.D. (1913) for the original publication of 'Hermes of the Ways'.
- 47 Pound (1913).
- 48 Duncan (2011) 229.
- 49 H.D. (1983) 71–84. Praise of H.D.'s *Iphigenia* poems: E. Gregory (1997) 142–7; Carne-Ross (2010) 240–1; Varney (2010). H.D. (1983) 616: the first two *Iphigeneia* choruses appeared in *Egoist* 2 (1915) 171–2; the full set appeared in *The Poets' Translation Series*, No. 3 (1916).
- 50 E. Gregory (1997) 184–5, quoted at 185.
- 51 Eliot (1951) 64.
- 52 Friedman (1990) 361.
- 53 *The Egoist*, 1915, quoted by Duncan (2011) 230.
- 54 Oswald (2011) 1.
- 55 Oswald (2011) 1: the similes derive from pastoral, the biographies from lament poetry.
- 56 See also the beginning of the third act-dividing song at H.D. (1983) 226 for further signs of Imagism in the 'Choros Translations'. Both C. K. Williams (1990) and Herb Golder (2001) repeated H.D.'s experiment, using short lines, relaxed metre and frequent repetition for the choral songs in their *Bacchae* translations.
- 57 Seaford (2016) 83 (emphasis original).
- 58 See e.g. Spears (1970) 3–34 and Childs (2008) 1–36.

Chapter 5: Dionysus in Ireland

- 1 Kennedy-Andrews (2002); Haughton (2007); Ennis (2014). Bracketed references in this chapter indicate page numbers of Mahon (1991).
- 2 Teevan (1998) 81; Homem (2004) 132.
- 3 Haughton (2007) 211.
- 4 Loraux (2002).
- 5 Mahon et al. (1999) 193, 188.
- 6 Scammell (1991) 6.
- 7 Quoted in N. Wroe, 'A Sense of Place', *The Guardian*, 22 July 2006.
- 8 Stewart (2002). See e.g. 'Songs of Praise' and 'The Globe in Carolina'.
- 9 See e.g. York (1992); C. Murray (1994); Haughton (2002); Homem (2004), (2009) 66–99; Perris (2008).
- 10 Homem (2004) 137.

- 11 C. Murray (1994).
- 12 Homem (2009) 89–90. See also Yao (2002) and Carne-Ross (2010) 238–49 on foreignization and Modernism.
- 13 Compare Dentith (2000) 9: ‘Parody includes any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice.’
- 14 Scammell (1991) 6; Derek Mahon, interview with Eve Patton, *Rhinoceros* 3, quoted in P. McDonald (1995) 201.
- 15 I described the second and third categories differently in Perris (2008).
- 16 Haughton (2007) 222; Enniss (2014) 223.
- 17 Mahon (2013) 9–10; Enniss (2014) 237.
- 18 RTÉ radio play: Mahon (2013) 10. Stage productions: Questors Theatre, London, 2002; UC-Davis, 2012; College of Charleston, 2014.
- 19 Enniss (2014) 234, citing a letter from Mahon to his editor Peter Fallon, 5 January 1993.
- 20 Haughton (2007) 222.
- 21 Mahon (2011) 160, under the title ‘Yaddo, or A Month in the Country’.
- 22 Mahon (2011) 160.
- 23 ‘As Time Goes By’, music and lyrics by Herman Hupfeld, originally in the Broadway musical *Everybody’s Welcome* (1931). ‘Highway Chile’ (1967), by The Jimi Hendrix Experience, quotes the same phrase. *The Yaddo Letter* echoes the song title: ‘as the years go by’.
- 24 Rosslyn (1997); see also Caplan (1999), especially 229–31.
- 25 Haughton (2007) 225.
- 26 *The Secret History* (1992) includes epigraphs from Nietzsche’s *Untimely Meditations*, Dodds’s *The Greeks and the Irrational* and Plato’s *Republic*. See Perris (2015) 519–20.
- 27 Mahon (2013) 11. See C. Murray (1994) 127–9.
- 28 Yeats (1996) 294.
- 29 Yeats (1996) 227.
- 30 C. Murray (1994).
- 31 C. Murray (1994) 128.
- 32 Taplin (2005) 251. See now Taplin (2015) xxv–xxix.
- 33 P. McDonald (1995) 189.
- 34 M. McDonald (1998) 197, confusing *verse* with *rhyme*: ‘verse signals the presence of a god’.
- 35 For example, Dionysus curses Pentheus in blank verse (40, 45).
- 36 Agaue’s lament over Pentheus’ corpse forms an ABCCBA sextet (58).
- 37 Walton (2002) 23.

- 38 Scharffenberger (1996); Kirkpatrick and Dunn (2002); Jendza (2015). This is not the only sense of the term 'paracomedy', but it is becoming prevalent.
- 39 Stevens (1976) 65; Silk (2000) 110 n. 28. Collard (2005) updates Stevens's monograph on colloquialisms in Euripides.
- 40 Baxter (1982) 289. Tom O'Dwyer also paraphrases 'Lord of the Dance': 'Remember, Mr Feingold, the spirit of wisdom danced in front of Jehovah before the world was made' (291).
- 41 Music publisher Stainer & Bell asserts Carter's authorship: <http://www.stainer.co.uk/lotd.html> (accessed 31 August 2015).
- 42 C. Murray (1994) 128.
- 43 I thank Bob Cowan for pointing out this allusion.
- 44 *OED*, s.v. 'gear', *n.*, attested since 1954; s.v. 'ecstasy', *n.*, attested since 1985.
- 45 *OED*, s.v. 'rave', *n.*, attested since 1989.
- 46 'To be sure': Todd (1989) 39. Sentence-final 'so': Hickey (2005) 129. 'So' in *Playboy*: Synge (1927/1975), lines 221, 258. 'Surely': lines 71, 92.
- 47 Mahon (2011) 168.
- 48 Mahon (2004) 54. The five Irish words translate roughly as 'noble', 'vivid', 'exciting', 'beautiful' and 'delightful'.
- 49 Haughton (2007) 1–20.
- 50 P. McDonald (1995) 187–8. In contrast, Taplin (2004) criticizes political readings of *The Cure at Troy*.
- 51 Mahon (1970) 93.
- 52 Homem (2009) 66–7 discusses 'the Mahon/Heaney duality'.
- 53 P. McDonald (1995) 197.
- 54 Taplin (1986) is the classic treatment of metatheatre and genre in Greek tragedy and comedy. The opening scene of *Frogs* makes for a useful comparison.
- 55 Heaney (1990) 2.
- 56 On priest-poets, see McKenzie (2003). Dennison (2015) addresses Heaney's attitude to poetry's 'adequacy' as a restorative response to violence; see especially p. 161. Heaney on poetic vocation: 'Digging', 'Casualty', 'The Singer's House', 'The First Gloss' (from 'Sweeney Redivivus'), 'From the Frontier of Writing'; see Heaney (1998). Mahon refusing vocation: 'Rock Music', 'The Attic', 'The Drawing Board', 'Courtyards in Delft', 'Hangover Square'. Heaney on redemptive poetics: 'North', 'In the Beech', 'Poet's Chair', 'Bone Dreams'.
- 57 Homem (2004) 131.
- 58 Dawe (1985) 219.
- 59 York (1992).
- 60 Scammell (1991) 6.

- 61 The Greek refers to frame drums (*tumpana*); elsewhere one finds reference to the pipes (*auloi*), a typical feature of Dionysiac music.
- 62 *Bacch.* 654: 'What? Gods can jump over walls, can't they?'
- 63 Dennison (2015) 190.
- 64 Heaney (1990) 77, 81.
- 65 Homem (2009) 90.
- 66 Mahon (2005) 68, 69. Homem (2009) 96–9 addresses the turn to redemption in *Oedipus* and other late works by Mahon.
- 67 Heaney (1990) 78.
- 68 Mahon (2011) 122.
- 69 McDonald and Walton (2002).
- 70 M. McDonald (2000) 25; see also M. McDonald (1998).
- 71 Mercier (1962) 210–48.
- 72 Mahon (2011) 212–13. See Homem (2009) 92–3 on earlier iterations of 'At the Gate Theatre' in which the poet's acceptance of Dionysus is more clearly pessimistic and ironic.

Chapter 6: East and West

- 1 The National Theatre archive holds a recording of the 2002 *Bacchae* and of the televised version of the 1981 *Oresteia* transmitted on Channel 4 on 9 October 1983; see Wrigley (2012). Bracketed references in the chapter indicate page numbers of Teevan (2002a).
- 2 *Bacchae* in performance: Fischer-Lichte (2014); Perris (2015) 521–33; E. Hall (2016); Wyles (2016). In Perris (2010), I advocate distinguishing literary reception from performance reception.
- 3 Teevan (2002a) 71; Croall (2007) 11, 14, 32.
- 4 Two plays about Alcmaeon, both lost, are attributed to Euripides: *Alcmaeon in Psophis* and *Alcmaeon in Corinth*.
- 5 Croall (2007) 11.
- 6 Beard (2010) 396.
- 7 P. Hall (2000). He reiterated his theories about Greek tragedy and applied them to *Bacchae* in a public lecture given in conjunction with the 2002 production (National Theatre archive recording RNT PL 3 739).
- 8 P. Hall (2000) 20, 38.
- 9 P. Hall (2000) 25, 26. Bronwyn Tweddle (personal communication) reminds me that Noh theatre has a similar ethos: 'Work the Mind Ten-Tenths, Work the Body Seven-Tenths' (Zeami).

- 10 P. Hall (2000) 38.
- 11 P. Hall (2000) 30.
- 12 P. Hall (2000) 29.
- 13 P. Hall (2000) 28.
- 14 P. Hall (2000) 30, 31.
- 15 Beard (2010) 395–6, quoted at 396.
- 16 Croall (2007) 19, 39, 60–1. See e.g. Parker (1986) 354 on the use of pre-recorded choral music in Hall's *Eumenides* finale.
- 17 In addition to Wrigley (2002) and Sponberg (2003), a number of reviews have been useful, including M. Wolf, 'Review: *Bacchai*', *Variety*, 23 May 2002; M. Billington, '*Bacchai*: National Theatre, London', *The Guardian*, 18 May 2002; and C. Spencer, 'Greek drama brilliantly staged – but one thing is missing', *The Telegraph*, 21 May 2002.
- 18 Wrigley (2002) 13. Compare Wiles (2007) 134: 'A major gain of Hall's ... mask work [in the 1981 *Oresteia*] was choreographic ... [T]he *Oresteia* chorus instinctively formed organic and aesthetically pleasing groupings.' See Sampatakakis (2004) and Sampatakakis (forthcoming) on *Bacchae* and performance style.
- 19 Beard (2010) 373; see also 372.
- 20 Parker (1986) 350. Harrison's regular dialogue metre is amphibrachic tetrameter, with substitutions: *da-DUM-da da-DUM-da da-DUM-da da-DUM-da*.
- 21 Harrison (1981) 34. Compare Aesch. Ag. 1158: (Cassandra) 'Iō, Scamander, river of my homeland.' See Parker (1986) 351.
- 22 Harrison (1981) 4. See Taplin (2005).
- 23 Teevan described his working methods in a public conversation at the National Theatre (National Theatre archive recording RNT PL 3 738). Edith Hall describes Euripides' Greek in similar terms at e.g. E. Hall (2002) 9. The parodos of Teevan's *Bacchae* (19–21) is the main exception to free-verse lyrics: the song includes passages in rhymed and unrhymed accentual-syllabic verse.
- 24 Verse can be defined as language written in distinct lines; free verse, by definition a kind of verse, can be defined as language written in separate lines with no regular syllabic pattern. See e.g. Fraser (1970) 2, 74; Hartman (1980) 11; Beyers (2001) 13.
- 25 Fraser (1970) 16: any chunk of English prose can be chopped into four-stress lines of accentual verse.
- 26 Pound (1913). See Hartman (1980) 130–43 and Beyers (2001) 13–60 on free verse and poetry.
- 27 Croall (2007) 20, 23.
- 28 National Theatre archive recording RNT PL 3 739.

- 29 One could analyse these lines e.g. as (1) acephalous iambic pentameter, trochaic substitution; (2) iambic pentameter; (3) acephalous iambic hexameter; (4) iambic hexameter (Alexandrine); (5) iambic hexameter, anapaestic substitution; (6) iambic tetrameter, anapaestic substitution x2; (7) iambic tetrameter, anapaestic substitution x2; and (8) iambic pentameter, anapaestic substitution x2.
- 30 Beard (2010) 396.
- 31 Croall (2007) 29, also 47–9.
- 32 Croall (2007) 49.
- 33 Perris (2011a) 42–6.
- 34 The Greek text is corrupt at this point, but the required sense and metre (dochmiacs) are clear, notwithstanding the scepticism of Diggle (1994a) 474–6. Like Carson, Teevan appears to take *phainēi* as a true passive, ‘you are made manifest’ (i.e. by something or someone), rather than the more natural middle sense ‘you appear’. Compare *Bacch.* 42: *phanenta thnētois* (‘appearing to mortals’).
- 35 Dodds on *Bacch.* 367; Roux on *Bacch.* 367 gives further Greek examples.
- 36 ‘But eventually people said that Dionysus had been stitched into Zeus’s thigh (*mēros*), changing the word ... a god served as a hostage (= *homēros*) to a goddess’ (*Bacch.* 295–7).
- 37 *Bakkhai* (Bacchai, Bacchae) is the plural of *Bakkhē* (‘maenad, Bacchant’); compare *Bakkhos* (Bacchus).
- 38 See e.g. J. Gregory (1985).
- 39 Croall (2007) 20, 17.
- 40 Croall (2007) 14.
- 41 Gen. 3.14–19, KJV: ‘And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life ... And unto Adam he said ... cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life ... In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.’
- 42 Norwood (1908); Verrall (1910) 1–163.
- 43 Teevan (2002b) 17–18, 75–6.
- 44 Perris (forthcoming).
- 45 E. Hall in Teevan (2004) 11.
- 46 Teevan (2004) 19.
- 47 Hera reflects on the passage of time in the final scene: Teevan (2004) 95.
- 48 Croall (2007) 91–2.

- 49 *Hellas* (Greece): 86, 274, 309, 465, 1024, 1356. *Asia* (Asia Minor = Asian Turkey): 17, 64. *Hellēn* (Greek): 18, 20, 23, 483, 779, 959, 1359. *Asias* (Asian): 1168. *barbaros* (foreign, barbarian): 18, 56, 407, 482, 604, 1034, 1334, 1354.
- 50 Greece and the Near East: Burkert (1992); M. L. West (1997).
- 51 Orientalism: Saïd (1978), including pp. 56–7 on *Bacchae*. See E. Hall (1989) and (2006) on Orientalism in tragedy. E. Hall (1989) 167–8: unlike the *Iliad*, *Bacchae* has Greeks and non-Greeks living together in Asia Minor (as was the case in the fifth century).
- 52 ‘East’: 17, 18 (*Bacch.* 21: ‘over there’), 30 (compare *Bacch.* 402). ‘West’: 20 (*Bacch.* 86: ‘Greece’), 28 (*Bacch.* 357: ‘Thebes’); 35; 36. ‘Western’: 18 (*Bacch.* 23: ‘Greece’), 67 (*Bacch.* 23: ‘Greece’).
- 53 Croall (2007) 39.
- 54 Beard (2010) 395–7.
- 55 ‘In this case, in fact, they [foreigners] are cleverer [than Greeks]. They do things differently’ (*Bacch.* 484).
- 56 *Bacch.* 357: ‘He’ll see a bitter end to his Dionysiac revels in Thebes.’ 491: ‘He’s a brave *bakkhos* [devotee of Dionysus] and a good speaker as well.’ 511: ‘Keep dancing there [in jail].’
- 57 *Bacch.* 86–7: ‘Greece’s wide streets, good for dancing.’ 533: ‘[O river Dircē,] Why do you reject me? Why are you trying to get away from me?’
- 58 Croall (2007) 19. Peter Hall’s interpretation substantively follows that of Dodds’s commentary.
- 59 Croall (2007) 11, 14 indicates the following timeline: some time in 2000, Hall commissions a translation from Teevan; he drafts a literal translation; February 2001, a revised version is read at the NT; December 2001, another revised version is used at a workshop at the NT; March 2002, rehearsals begin.
- 60 Croall (2007) 14.
- 61 Croall (2007) 27.
- 62 Croall (2007) 38.
- 63 K. Fricker, ‘Review: *The Bacchae of Baghdad*’, *The Guardian*, 15 March 2006.
- 64 E. Hall (2002) 13.

Chapter 7: These Go to Eleven

- 1 Bracketed references in this chapter indicate page numbers of Greig (2007). I saw the play in 2007 during its initial run at the King’s Theatre, Edinburgh. On Greig’s plays, see Wallace (2013) and the essays in Müller and Wallace (2011).

- 2 Meineck (2007) 163.
- 3 Fisher and Greig (2011) 15.
- 4 Pattie (2011); Inchley (2011).
- 5 See Meineck (2007) 163–5.
- 6 After the 2007 Edinburgh Festival, the play moved to the Theatre Royal, Glasgow and the Lyric Hammersmith, London; 2008 saw tour dates in Aberdeen and Inverness before a stint in New York for the Lincoln Center Festival. Cadmus and Tiresias were played by Scottish actors (Ewan Hooper and Ralph Riach).
- 7 Corbett (2011) 104: the post-devolution years in Scotland were ‘marked by notable translations of classical drama’.
- 8 Rebellato (2007) 213.
- 9 Inchley (2011) 80: ‘The values that informed the production of *The Bacchae* to some extent represented a defiant capitulation to such expectations.’
- 10 ‘Alan Cumming interview: seen the future, got the t-shirt’, *The Scotsman*, 1 November 2008.
- 11 M. Billington, ‘*The Bacchae*: King’s Theatre, Edinburgh’, *The Guardian*, 13 August 2007.
- 12 Greig (n.d.).
- 13 Greig (n.d.).
- 14 Greig (n.d.).
- 15 Quoted in Burnet (2007).
- 16 Greig (n.d.), in which he uses the word ‘translate’ to describe the writing process. Greig (2007) is © David Greig; the half-title verso contains the phrase ‘from a literal translation by Ian Ruffell’.
- 17 Quoted in Burnet (2007).
- 18 Greig (n.d.).
- 19 Greig (n.d.).
- 20 Greig and Rodosthenous (2011) 10–11.
- 21 Hardwick (2010b) 58, 59, 61.
- 22 Hardwick (2010a) 196 discusses the ‘positive and non-antiquarian’ authenticity of Greig’s *Bacchae*.
- 23 Choul (1981).
- 24 Choul (1981), quoted at 17, 19. See Rosenmeyer (2002) on metatheatre and ‘overload’.
- 25 Some exceptions: ‘Aktaeon’ (19) instead of either ‘Aktaion’ or ‘Actaeon’; ‘Olympus’ (34); ‘Dirce’ (65); the title is *Bacchae* (not *Bakkhai*).
- 26 Quoted in Burnet (2007).
- 27 Quoted in Burnet (2007). On Seidensticker, see above, p. 37 with n. 73.

- 28 Quoted in Burnet (2007). Similarly, 'Ruffell agrees: "There might be some sucking of teeth among literalists, but I think David Greig's version actually keeps very close to the spirit of the play."'
- 29 Dodds on *Bacch.* 644.
- 30 Teevan (2002a) 40: 'Who dares defy my justice? Ea! Ea!' (40).
- 31 Rutherford (2012) 113–18 offers a useful account, with bibliography, of alliteration and assonance in Greek tragedy.
- 32 Pentheus also complains about Tiresias and Dionysus' 'Perverted / Paraphernalia' (17) and commands his men to 'bind him [Dionysus], / Beat him and bring him to me' (20).
- 33 'Pentheus – poor prince' (20); 'pent-up Pentheus' (39).
- 34 The source text for the second quote (*Bacch.* 639) is straightforward in Greek: 'What ever will he say after this?'
- 35 Inchley (2011) 77–80, quoted at 78.
- 36 The first four lines of this refrain are in iambic tetrameters: *da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM*. The verses of 'Jesus Loves Me' and 'Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild' are in catalectic trochaic tetrameters (in hymnodic terms: 7.7.7.7.), in effect acephalous (headless) iambic tetrameters: *DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM*. Greig's 'extra' fifth line, an iambic pentameter, marks off the first four as being a kind of rhythmically separate section or stanza, just like the verses of the hymns which it quotes. That is: the verses of the two hymns use basically the same four-stress rhythm and the same four-line stanza as the refrain in Greig's *Bacchae*.
- 37 There are fainter verbal echoes of, among other examples, the Fleetwood Mac song 'Second Hand News', from the album *Rumours* (1977); and the Guns N' Roses song 'Paradise City', from the album *Appetite for Destruction* (1987).
- 38 Burnet (2007).
- 39 E.g. the Edinburgh International Festival 2007 programme for *Bacchae*. Meineck (2007) 163 corroborates my point about the use of this image in advertising materials.
- 40 These flames were, at least at the original Edinburgh production, very real and very warm.
- 41 Kane (2001) 120: in *Cleansed*, as two characters have sex, 'A sunflower bursts through the floor and grows above their heads'. Owen (2005) 295: in *Cancer Time* (2004), two characters sit as 'gradually, the city disappears beneath grass and wild flowers. // They sit. / And gradually the buildings all crumble to the ground'.
- 42 Pentheus also says: 'You're a charlatan, stranger, / But your act's a good one' (26).
- 43 Elsewhere, the chorus claims that Agaue's victory is 'Told of in history / Made into tragedy' (70).
- 44 See Perris (forthcoming) on violence in adaptations of Greek tragedy.

- 45 Inchley (2011) 79.
- 46 Hardwick (2010a) 194–5, reporting a personal communication from J. W. George about the final performance on 18 August 2007.
- 47 E.g. Inchley (2011) 78: ‘a roving black American female Chorus’.
- 48 Meineck (2007) 167.
- 49 Grose et al. (2005) 74.
- 50 Grose et al. (2005) 76.
- 51 Grose et al. (2005) 84.
- 52 Grose et al. (2005) 74.
- 53 Grose et al. (2005) 75.
- 54 Grose et al. (2005) 70: in the original performance, the three chorus-members, who don tutus before the opening scene, were men.
- 55 Grose et al. (2005) 115.
- 56 Carl Grose in Grose et al. (2005) 65.
- 57 See Hardwick (2007) 91–3 on Greig’s *Oedipus*.
- 58 Greig (2005) 6, 2. See Sierz (2001) on ‘In-Yer-Face’ drama.
- 59 Greig (2005) 77.
- 60 Berkoff (2000) 38–9; Sierz (2001) 25–6.
- 61 Kane (2001) ix–xviii.
- 62 See Perris (forthcoming). Berkoff’s *Agamemnon* (full première 1976) and *Oedipus* are called ‘versions’.
- 63 Sierz (2001) 39, 62; Wallace (2013) 3–5.
- 64 Greig (2005) 80. Berkoff (2000) 112: in *Greek*, also in capital letters, Oedipus says, ‘OH, MAGGOT SCRATCHER [i.e. Margaret Thatcher] HANG THE CUNT’S / HANG THEM SLOW AND LET ME TAKE A SKEWER AND JAB THEIR EYES OUT / LOVELY / GREEK STYLE’.
- 65 Meineck (2007) 166. See Foley (2010) 141–4 on ‘generic ambiguity’ in the Tiffany–Greig *Bacchae*.
- 66 Choul (1981) 18. Fiordo (1989) addresses hypersemiotic and hyposemiotic communication.

Chapter 8: Epilogue

- 1 I had written much of this book by the time Robertson’s *Bacchae* appeared; I was already drafting the conclusion when Carson’s did. I note that Carson’s *Bacchae*, Colin Teevan’s and Mike Poulton’s are published on the same imprint, Oberon.
- 2 Robertson (2014) xxvii.

- 3 Robertson (2014) 89–94.
- 4 Robertson (2014) xxvii. Borrowed phrases include ‘midwived by the lightning fire’ (7); ‘you see how changed my fortunes are’ (81); ‘Terrible is the ruin / Lord Dionysus has visited on this house’ (84); ‘Terrible the treatment he received from us: / his name was dishonoured in Thebes’ (84). Compare Kovacs: ‘midwived by the lightning fire’ (13); ‘you see how changed my fortunes are’ (147); ‘Yes: terrible is the ruin Lord Dionysus has *brought on your* house’ (151); ‘Terrible *was* the treatment he *had* from us, *since* his name was *unhonored* in Thebes’ (153).
- 5 Robertson (2014) xxvi, 79, 80. Most scholarly editions and translations of *Bacchae* do not in fact fill in the lacunae with such ‘connective tissue’. Arrowsmith’s *Bacchae*, which Robertson mentions, did once include a hypothetical restoration; the most recent edition relegates it to an appendix.
- 6 Robertson (2014) 40, 12. ‘Evian’ is a famous brand of bottled water.
- 7 Robertson (2014) 43.
- 8 Robertson (2014) 63, 65.
- 9 Robertson (2014) 52.
- 10 S. Ruden, ‘Back to Tragedy’ (review), *The New Criterion*, January 2015.
- 11 The title verso page of Carson’s *Bacchae* (2015a) formally identifies her as the ‘author of this version’ of *Bacchae*; the text is later described as an ‘adaptation’ (10). In *Antigone* (2015b), the title verso page identifies Carson as the ‘author of this translation’. Similarly, Mike Poulton is the ‘author of this version’ of *Bacchae* (2010). In *Iph ...* (2002b), Colin Teevan is identified as ‘author of this translation and adaptation’.
- 12 Bracketed references in the rest of this chapter indicate page numbers of Carson (2015a); any unusual formatting features are original. A poem entitled ‘the task of the translator of antigone’ prefaces *Antigonick*: Carson (2012/2015) 3–5.
- 13 Mikalson (1991) 22, with bibliography on p. 241. The three possible examples of *daimōn* as ‘spirit’ in tragedy (Eur. *Med.* 1391, *Hec.* 163–4, *El.* 1233–5) are inconclusive; in these passages, *daimōn* and *theos* can be read as redundant synonyms.
- 14 Overall, Carson translates *daimōn* or *daimonios* with ‘*daimon*’ or ‘*daimonic*’ 75 per cent of the time; the rest of the time, *daimōn* is translated, if at all, as ‘god’ or ‘gods’. Translation of *daimōn* as ‘*daimon*’ or ‘*daimonic*’ (eleven instances): *Bacch.* 22, 42, 200, 219, 256, 272, 298, 413, 481, 769, 1325; Carson (2015a) 13, 14, 20 (twice), 21, 22 (twice), 26, 29, 40, 68. Translation of *daimōn* as ‘god’ or ‘gods’ (three instances): *Bacch.* 417, 498, 1246; Carson (2015a) 26, 30, 63. Translation of *daimonios* as ‘*daimonic*’: *Bacch.* 894, 1388; Carson (2015a) 47, 71. Carson (2015a) 25 does not use any of these words in translating *Bacch.* 377. Carson does not italicize other Greek words e.g. ‘thyrsos’.
- 15 Carson (1986) 33 (emphasis original).

- 16 Carson (1986) 77, 168–73.
- 17 Beekes (2010) s.v. χλόη.
- 18 E.g. Pind. *Nem.* 8.40; Eur. *Cyc.* 67, *Hec.* 126, *Med.* 906, 922; Soph. *Trach.* 847–8.
- 19 E.g. Irwin (1974) 31–78.
- 20 Zellner (2006) 294–6 argues for ‘greener than grass’.
- 21 Lawrence (2013) 300: true happiness (*eudaimonia*) is the theme of the third act-dividing song.
- 22 Dodds on *Bacch.* 866–70.
- 23 Soyinka (1973) 1.
- 24 Carson (2002) 63.
- 25 Carson (2015b) 23.
- 26 Billings (2010) 21–3. Martindale (2013) 174–5, discussing Billings’s argument, contends that desire for something lost is part of, but not unique to, classical reception.

Conclusions

- 1 Holmes (1970); I have approximated the basic form of Holmes’s illustration. See Bassnett (2014a) 110–11, (2014b) 88–90.
- 2 Bassnett (2014a) 111.
- 3 Benjamin (1968) 72.
- 4 Reynolds (2013) 102.
- 5 Ireland: P. McDonald (1995); M. McDonald (2000); McDonald and Walton (2002). Scotland: Hardwick (2003b); Brown (2013). Scotland and Wales: Brown, Ramage and Sherlock (2000). England, Scotland and Ireland: Hardwick (2007).
- 6 M. McDonald (2000) 25; see also M. McDonald (1998). See p. 111.
- 7 Tiresias: ‘This new *daimōn* who you’ve been mocking [i.e. Dionysus] ...’ (*Bacch.* 272); ‘Two things are the most important for humans: the goddess (*thea*) Demeter ... The next one, Semele’s son ...’ (274–8).
- 8 Versnel (2011) 40.
- 9 Versnel (1990) 96–205; Versnel (2011) 43.
- 10 Isler-Kerényi (2015) 241.
- 11 Greig (2007) 21.
- 12 See e.g. the essays in Lauriola and Demetriou (2015).
- 13 Perris (2012b) 163–4: *Rhesus* is also about Hector and his impending death.
- 14 *Medea* and suffrage: Hall and Macintosh (2005) 511–19. Colin Teevan’s *Medea*-inspired monologue ‘The Last Word’ (from *Missing Persons*), delivered by an

abandoned father, inverts gender roles without deviating from tried-and-true subjects (love, sex, gender, parenthood).

15 Heath (1987) 90.

16 E. Hall (2016).

17 Seaford (2006).

18 Segal (1997).

19 Venuti (2008b), quoted at 29.

20 Venuti (2008b) 27.

21 Kermode (1975).

22 Derrida (1982) 320.

23 Benjamin (1968) 70–1, quoted at 71.

24 Martindale (2008) 93.

25 Martindale (2007) 310, citing E. Prettejohn, ‘Reception and Ancient Art: The Case of the *Venus de Milo*’, in Martindale and Thomas (2006).

26 Perris (2011a). See also e.g. Oranje (1984); Robertson (2014) xxv. See Sommerstein (2016) 39–40 on the bleak but not completely dark ending.

27 Versnel (1990) 96–205, esp. 172–89. According to Lawrence (2013) 300–4, the correct ethical response is for Pentheus to relax his standards so as to make room in society for Dionysiac religion.

28 Segal (1999–2000) 291.

29 Steiner (1975) 47.

30 Venuti (2013).

Glossary of Terms and Greek Words

1 See e.g. Venuti (2008a) 13–20 on domestication and foreignization.

2 Venuti (2008a) 15. According to Reynolds (2013) 139–41, Venuti exaggerates the hegemony of fluency and domestication.

3 Klaudy (2009) 104.

4 Klaudy (2009) 106–7.

5 Venuti (2008a) 4, 47.

6 Venuti (1998) 12, (2008a) 35–82.

7 Bakker, Koster and Van Leuven-Zwart (2009) 269–71, quoted at 269; also Toury (1980) 12, 17.

8 Venuti (2004) 484.

9 E.g. Seaford (2006) 32–4.

10 Venuti (2008a) 30.

- 11 Venuti (2008a), esp. 1–34. On invisibility, fluency and so on, see also Venuti (2013) 109–15.
- 12 Venuti (2008a) 4. Reynolds (2013) 100–1, 151 identifies different kinds of translationese and defends certain uses of it. On translationese in general, see Reynolds (2013) 145–66, ‘Browning and Translationese’.

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